Introduction

Why has fly-fishing survived since Biblical times to the present? What compels anglers through the ages to persistently set foot in or near water in search of success that so frequently eludes them? This paper explores the world of fly-fishing by asking what attracts and sustains participants in their passionate enthusiasm for the sport given its demanding nature and frequently disappointing results.

No prior fly-fishing experience is required. The discussion will first provide background on the sport including important history, fundamentals and basic techniques. The investigation then shifts to explore fly-fishing in theological terms, as "lived religion," in order to shed light on what is it means to live by faith, whether in or far from the stream. Guiding the process is the theory that *fly-fishing disciplines are spiritual practices that equip hopeful participants for unpredictable encounters that emerge from under life's surface and unfold as the future approaches.*

Fly-fishing's Past: From Antiquity to Modern History

The sport of fly-fishing has not only existed for centuries but for millennia. The Chinese were among the first to value the sport of fly-fishing in antiquity. As early as 400 B.C.E. the Chou Dynasty used native bamboo cane and silk filament to fish as a contemplative pastime.[1] Writing about the experience of fly-fishing became a tradition very early in recorded history. In the first

[1] Charles Jardine, *The Classic Guide to Fly-Fishing For Trout* (New York: Random House, 1991), 9.

century of the common era, Spanish poet Marcus Valerius Martialis (40 -103), who was noted in Roman society for his epigrams, wrote this one about fly-fishing: "Who has not seen the fish rise, decoyed and killed by fraudulent flies!"[2] In the third century, Claudius Aelianus (175-235) wrote this early description for creating a lure to use when casting a fly into a Macedonian stream near present-day Bulgaria's Rhodopi Mountains, where trout are still reportedly caught: "…the fishermen wind red wool around their hooks and fastern to the wool two feathers that row under a cock's settles and which are the color of dark wax."[3]

Over a millennium later, near the end of the Middle Ages, Aelianus' formula for making "redde capons hackyll" appeared in "Treatyse on Fysshynge With an Angle" written by a truly unlikely author, Dame Juliana Berners (b. 1388- ?). A nun of Sopwell Priory, located on the River Ver near St. Albans in Hertfordshire, England, Dame Berners' essay provided guidelines for rod, line, hook and lure-making, based on different seasons of the year. Her material was used to expand an earlier version of a work published in 1496, entitled *The Bloke of St. Albans* that originally had included text exclusively about English hawking and hunting.[4]

A century and a half later, Izaak Walton (1593-1683), visited the streams of Dame Berners' region before publishing the first edition of *The Compleat Angler,* in 1653. He continued editing and expanding the book over the next twenty-five years. Not a particularly good fisherman himself, Walton relied upon his friend, Charles Cotton (1630-1687), to write the text's specific material on fly-fishing, which appeared as of the book's 1676 edition.[5] Walton's intention in the book was not to provide a how-to manual but rather a book of observations on fishing. While considered a fly-fishing classic and contemporarily best known by the book's shortened name, the volume's full title is more descriptive of its nature, *The Compleat Angler: Or, The Contemplative Man's Recreation*. Still very popular, the book is reportedly the third most printed text in the English language, preceded only the *Holy Bible* and *Pilgrim's Progress*.[6] While convoluted at times, Walton's 17th century language characterizes fly-fishing as both a pleasant and restorative pastime "…free from hurly-burly in the company of friends intent on physical and moral sustenance." As he describes the demands associated with the sport, Walton advises fishermen that "to be a good Angler must not only bring an inquiring, searching, observing wit," but requires one to be realistically equipped with "a large measure of hope and patience...." so that independent on one's catch for the day, "Doubt not but Angling will prove to be so pleasant, that it will prove to be like a virtue, a reward to itself."[7]

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[2] The original Latin text reads: "Hic scarus aequoreis qui venit adesus ab undis visceribus bonus est, cetera vile sapit." Marcus Valerii. Martialis, *M. Valerii Martialis epigrammaton libri* [book on-line: http://books.google.com/books?id=vmj0VY-IEzcC] (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, digitized August 4, 2005, accessed 15 April 2008); available from: http://books.google.com/books?id=vmj0VY-IEzcC&pg=PA316&lpg=PA316&dq=hic+scarus+aequoreis+qui+venit+adesus+ab+undis+visceribus+bonus+est+cetera+vile+sapit&source=web&ots=Ihh9tetgIL&sig=fdRhmqwaWrDXC6ZtzywLU6edaPw&hl=en **;** Internet.

[3] Jardine, *The Classic Guide to Fly Fishing For Trout*, 10.

[4] Ibid., 11.

[5] Samuel Snyder, "New Streams of Religion: Fly Fishing as a Lived, Religion of Nature." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75. no. 4. (December, 2007): 904.

[6] Snyder, "New Streams of Religion: Fly Fishing as a Lived, Religion of Nature," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 903.

[7] Walton, Isaak and Charles Cotton, *The Compleat Angler: Or, The Contemplative Man's Recreation* (New York: Modern Library, 1939), 15, 16.

Many local clubs of fly fishermen developed as the popularity of fly-fishing grew in the 19th century, particularly in England and Scotland. Preferences in techniques, locations and lures associated with the sport began to create competition and divisions among anglers. The first principal fly-casting technique used was called "dry fly-fishing." It involved casting upstream so that one's fly landed lightly and floated on clear water's surface. To fly fish milkier, weedy streams, George E. M. Skues (1858-1849) introduced nymph fishing. The technique was defined as presenting a tiny insect in an early stage of its life cycle development, to a fish, by landing the fly just underneath rather than on top of the water's surface. Skues' wrote about the technique, in *Minor Tactics of the Chalk Stream* in 1910 and *The Way of a Trout with a Fly* in 1921. The new method proved wildly successful among delighted northern England and Scottish anglers while horrifying other countrymen who viewed Skues' innovative departure from traditional dry fly techniques as sacrilege. The matter came to a head in 1938, when an official British Fly Fishers Club Debate was held on "the ethics of nymphing on chalk streams." With every major fly-fishing expert in the country in attendance to either hear or deliver arguments, a favorable conclusion was reached concerning the technique's merits.[8] Wet fly-fishing technique or the casting of a fly downstream toward a bank and letting it be drawn into the main current before retrieving the fly from the water, was introduced by Scotsman W. C. Stewart (1832-1872), in 1857, and described in his book, *The Practical Angler*.[9] The practice of wet fly-casting was also quickly adopted and thrived as the third major fly-casting technique.

While dry fly-casting, nymphing and wet fly-casting were first established in Europe, they crossed the pond to gain popularity in United States where local river conditions and trout

[8] Andrew N Herd, "G.E.M. Skues," *A Fly Fishing History* [Internet Website: http://www.flyfishinghistory.com/] (accessed 15 April 2008); available at http://www.flyfishinghistory.com/skues.htm# . Internet.

[9] W. C. Stewart, *The Practical Angler, or The Art of Trout-Fishing More Particularly Applied to Clear Water* (London, UK: Adam and Charles Black, 1944), 40-44.

habitats demanded the same series of techniques. American fly-fishing began in the 1850s on the Beaverkill River in New York State's Catskill Mountains.[10] Trout-rich streams, particularly in the eastern and upper mid-western United States, attracted many enthusiasts to fly-fishing through the early 1920s. During the 1950s interest in the sport rose again significantly as improvements were introduced to fly-rods, lines and reels. Waves of enthusiasm broke again in the 1970s and 1990s when cult-like general interest was sparked by media's release of new books and films about fly-fishing.

For well over half a century, Native American Lee Wulff (1905-1991) and his wife, Joan Salvato Wulff (b.1926) became nationally prominent anglers and skillful instructors who dedicated themselves to promoting good technique, to equipment improvements such as the Wulff-tied dry fly and to developing a passion for fly-fishing among novice to expert anglers. The Wulffs cultivated knowledge and love of the sport through individualized instruction. They focused upon skill building of casting techniques, as well as proper use and selection of rod, line and flies; how to read a stream and insect conditions; how to locate fish feeding areas and how to sense environmental conditions as well as possible risks to an angler. All of these skills are important to consciously consider before setting foot into the water to fly fish. Still in existence, the Wulff School of Flyfishing became the standard for fly-fishing school instruction throughout the United States. Such guidance extends beyond learning techniques to fishing etiquette, particularly concerning how to hook, net and carefully handle fish so that those caught are released and returned into the water unharmed. Resurgent interest in the sport over the recent decades has spawned many opportunities to learn and hone fly-fishing skills all over the U.S. via personal lessons, special guide services and trips to such exotic global fly-fishing locales as Labrador, Chile and New Zealand.

Those who first approach the sport quickly find how demanding it is. Learning fly-fishing skill requires significant practice and patience whether acquired through guidance passed on from family members, taught by professionals or learned from experience through trial and error. Many insist learning via all three is essential. Fly-fishing techniques and traditions developed over the years enable love of the sport to be shared among friends and passed from one generation to another. In addition to communicating special methods, fishing rituals, secret spots

[10] Austin S. Francis, *Catskill Rivers, Birthplace of American Fly Fishing* (Piscataway, NJ: Winchester Press, 1983), xiii.

and favorite fish stories, enthusiasm for fly-fishing, beyond developing ability and sharing experiences, has inspired expression in a variety of additional forms. They include a wealth of literature like short stories by Ernest Hemingway, music like Schubert's classical piece, *The Trout,* to Adirondack paintings by Winslow Homer and to feature films, the best known being the 1992 movie, *A River Runs Through It,* based on the 1976 novel by author Norman MacLean. The movie's release spiked enthusiasm for fly-fishing appreciably across the country.[11]

Fly-Fishing Fundamentals: Casting, Flies and the Environment

In other forms of fishing the lure's weight serves to pull the line from the reel through guidelines of the rod during a cast. In fly-fishing the spring of the rod is mainly responsible for gaining distance in a cast. The fly lands upon the surface and floats at least momentarily, depending upon the direction of the cast, before sinking into the current. Any hungry fish prowling the area for what appears tasty may lunge to ingest the fly and either break the water's surface or else grab the lure as it streams by underwater.

Among five traditional fly-casting methods the Basic Overhead Cast is most fundamental.[12] Fly-casting skill can only be mastered through repetitive practice and gentle correction offered by more knowledgeable practitioners. To see the animated version of the basic overhead fly-cast illustrated in the graphic below, visit the web link indicated in the footnote.[13]

The best way for beginners to learn casting is to practice in a dry, open space rather than in a stream to avoid slipping, falling or the risk of injury. It is best to attach a feather rather than a fly to the line to prevent hooking oneself, trees, brush or someone else. There are three basic steps in making a cast, although one of the steps is held for two moments, creating what is known as casting's "four count rhythm."[14] The first moving step begins with the rod, poised in a forward 10 o'clock position. The fisherman lifts the fly line gently off of the ground back and overhead to a 2 o'clock position. The second step is a momentary pause, for two counts, to let the line straighten out in the air behind the angler. The third step is to bring the rod forward to the 10 o'clock position again, allowing the line to unroll forward until the fly lands gently on the surface. Employing a lot of force is unnecessary. The spring of the rod, against the backward pull of the line is the main factor affecting the distance of the cast. When the fly line remains parallel to the surface, during both the back and forward casts, the angler casts properly. There is a

[11] View an on-line clip of fly-fishing excerpted from the 1992 film. Robert Redford, dir. *A River Runs Through It* [Motion Picture] (London, UK: Allied Filmmakers, 9 October 1992), available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxz9dVncQGM&feature=related . Internet.

[12] Jardine, *The Classic Guide to Fly Fishing For Trout,* 160, 161.

[13] View the basic overhead fly-casting motion in an animated graphic on-line. Steve Brown, *Flyfishing Index* [Internet Website: http://www.flyfishingindex.com/] (Pleasant Grove, UT, 2005), (accessed 15 April 2008); available at http://www.flyfishingindex.com/index.htm. Internet.

[14] Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 7, 8.

rhythmic movement to each cast which ends with the line settled gently. Casting repetitiously becomes engrained as rhythmic movement that becomes a dance one's arms and mind.

The angler selects which artificial fly to use based upon insect life, time of day and season in which flies appear as well as water conditions. Created with natural or synthetic materials, trout flies are available in over six hundred commercial patterns and come in sizes based on the size of the lure's hook. That number of fly patterns does not begin to measure those flies that anglers create themselves. Fly patterns may or may not replicate real flies, for their task may simply be to stimulate and make fish aggressive rather than to offer them a meal. Fishermen often must learn through trial and error that fish ignore a fly that is the wrong type, color or size.

How does one select a fly? Wise fly-fishing guides respond, "know something about basic entomology!"[15] There are six different varieties of insects and aquatic forms each of which appeal to trout at various stages of insect maturation. The accompanying chart (see Appendix A) illustrates generally when and where each major type of fly, which anglers often call "hatch," is typically of greatest interest to the fish at certain seasons. As experienced fly fishermen and guides know, the most well-researched and developed hatch charts and emergence schedules often prove untrustworthy predictors of that season's patterns of mayflies, caddis flies, flat-winged flies, stone and damsel flies, and terrestrials.[16] To cope, some anglers ask guides and local anglers what fish are biting. Others rely on flies that have become personal favorites. Independent of current conditions, a few tie on a classic fly, such as a Royal Coachman, known for its versatility. Novices may simply be pleased to properly knot a modest fly of any sort on a line and not lose it in a tree, rocks or otherwise snap the fly off the line in the whipping motion of too quick a cast.

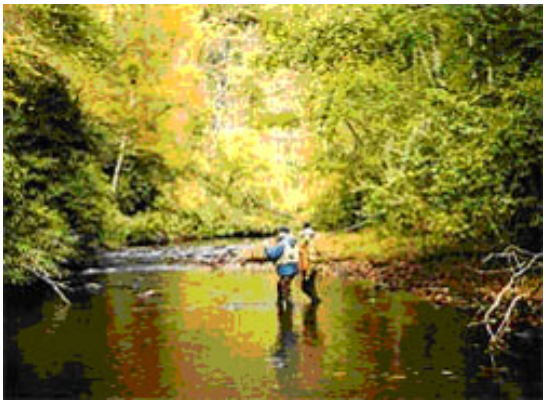
Those dedicated to the sport develop consciousness of the environmental conditions that enable anglers to "read the stream" and to "match the hatch." They look for banks, rocks, rapids and pools where fish are most likely live. They also detect evidence of insects. Both types of observations inform the type, color and size of flies selected for use. Fishing circumstances

[15] Paul Arnold, "Gary LaFontaine (Deer Lodge, Montana)," *Wisdom of the Guides* (Portland, OR: Frank Amato Publications, 1998), 14.
[16] John Merwin, *The New American Trout Fishing* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1994), 176.

change frequently and may warrant changing fly patterns many times during a single day. For example, one might start fishing Montana's Gallatin River in early August by casting dry and upstream as the current flows low yet swift and clear across uneven rocky bottom, having chosen a 10-or 12-size Elk Hair Caddis. This is because pine moths that resemble the tan-colored fly often hatch at that time of year. If there's little action the angler might try a Stone Fly or other favorite local pattern. Even the best preparation and techniques are no guarantee fish will bite. Beginners often feel successful if they just remain standing upright in a fast current as they knot an alternate fly on a monofilament line or leader which may barely be visible in the glare of a sunlit river. Tying a fly to a line concentrates all one's powers of sight, finger dexterity, steadiness and patience. Once secure, a choice fly is flung in greeting toward the trout, leaving the angler hoping for some reply.

Fly-fishing has to be done standing, not sitting, in an alert, silent posture. Fishermen often move several feet up or down stream every few casts. Fly-casting may also be done from a floating boat on a wide waterway like Montana's Madison River or Michigan's Muskegan River. Clad in chest waders, harnessed and floating in large inflated inner tubes, some anglers fish waters like Southern Colorado's Shuree Ponds or Northern New Mexico's Chama River. Many fly fishermen prefer carefully stepping into the river itself in order to feel the water press, swirl and rise around their legs. Equipped with rod in one hand, some use a staff in the other as a kind of antenna or third leg with which to test the depth, texture and slipperiness of the bottom. Wading into deeper water, the angler tests the ground which is detectable yet invisible beneath the surface, takes a noiseless next step and stops, then lifts the rod to issue a silent cast and wait. Repetition helps the fisherman memorize the behavior of the step-cast-wait // cast-wait // cast-wait // cast-wait // step-cast-wait cycle in both the mind and muscles. Practiced consciously at first, the action is gradually integrated and becomes reflexive.

Having introduced the history of fly-fishing along with fundamentals and routines associated with the sport, we shift to explore how fly-fishing and theology intersect. Specifically. we will think more deeply of ways in which fly-fishing experience equips participants for encounters with the unseen. We will first examine how fly-fishing qualifies as lived religious experience and second, consider how dedicated anglers demonstrate their commitment to fly-fishing particularly in light of the sport's prospects for the future. We will look for insights from anglers, both individuals and groups, concerning how to approach and treat life unseen as it emerges and takes tangible form. We will also consider what anglers might have to teach about preserving such moments as memorable and accessible to afford others the opportunity to have such experiences.



Fly-Fishing as Lived Religion In Nature

In his recent article, "New Streams of Religion: Fly Fishing as a Lived, Religion of Nature," Dr. Samuel Snyder describes a subfield of religious studies known as "lived religion."[17] Endorsed by scholars including David Chidester and Robert Orsi, "lived religion" de-emphasizes traditional definitions and structures associated with religion. Instead, "lived religion" focuses on how individuals orient themselves to the world in which they live and define what is sacred or profane based on their response to problems and contradictions faced in the course of life everyday.[18] The main interest in studying "lived religion" is to identify the theological meaning individuals draw from their world of real experience and to detect how they integrate those understandings into their attitudes, decisions and actions.

Snyder describes at least seven ways that fly-fishing experience is relevant to religious life.

First is the general notion that nature, specifically the solitary, expansive wild beauty of fishable lakes and streams, provides a symbolic vehicle that orients anglers toward the sacred.[19] Novelist and fly fisherman David J. Duncan wrote that the quiet splendor of such settings facilitates personal pursuit of connection between an angler and the natural world at a variety of levels, the deepest of which, through practice, is desire to merge with the natural world itself.[20] The mechanics of fly-fishing are only the vehicle that opens the door to wider experience. Ted Leesom wrote in his book, *The Habit of Rivers,* "The craft of angling is the catching of fish," yet, he later continued, "the art of angling is a receptiveness to . . . connections, the art of letting one thing lead to another until, if only locally and momentarily, you realize some small completeness."[21]

Second, anglers become part of a larger common community as they learn the skills of the sport from experienced family members, friends or professionals and report experiences of disappointment and success to one another. They also absorb traditions through other fly-fishing aficionados or believers even though fly-fishing remains essentially a personal activity.[22] Learning to fly fish then is an ongoing experiential, catechetical and developmental process in which even expert practitioners are willing to admit there is always more about the sport to learn both with and from others. A portable sense of identity and collegiality also generally exists among fishermen. Whether, for example, anglers originate from Maine, Georgia, Oregon or Missouri, their basic practices and interests are remarkably similar although their local fly-fishing environments are quite different.

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[17] Snyder, "New Streams of Religion: Fly Fishing as a Lived, Religion of Nature," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 897, 898.
[18] Ibid., 898, 899.
[19] Ibid.,, 900.
[20] Ibid., 901.
[21] Christopher Lehman-Haupt, "Books of The Times On Catching Trout and Letting Go," in *The New York Times* [Newspaper on-line: http://www.nytimes.com/] (New York, NY, 7 April 1994), (accessed 30 April 2008); available at http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F02E5DC163EF934A35757C0A962958260&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=all . Internet.
[22] Ibid.

Third, "fly-fishing forces you to understand bugs, fish habitat and life cycles" and invites a person to "therefore connect more deeply with nature and God."[23] Such knowledge and feelings infer not only a reverence for nature, as Snyder illustrates through these words of one fly-fishing blogger, but also a desire to preserve insect, fish and water habitats. In this light, it is not surprising that Trout Unlimited, the largest U.S. fly-fishing membership organization, is commited to protecting, restoring and sustaining fish habitats and watershed areas across the country. Such efforts will be discussed at later point.

Fourth, fly-fishing controversies related to the sports' history, myths and practices reflect serious passion for not only "doing" the sport but also indicate anglers' commitment to observing, preserving and sometimes modifying fly-fishing traditions. On occasion such matters involve integrating improvements in technique or equipment into personal, routine practice. Other times issues relate to correcting fly-fishing myths or misconceptions so that more accurate, clarified understandings subsequently become part of collective, authoritative fly-fishing tradition. Nineteenth century British fishing clubs' institutional reaction to nymph casting was initially hostile, as described earlier. However, once the method was scrutinized for its merits and applicability to a very common fly-fishing problem the practice was endorsed and widely applied. Samuel Snyder reported the angling public's very mixed response to demythologizing

[23] Ibid., 901.

fishing icon Isaak Walton, who reportedly never cast a fly rod himself. It appears Walton also may well have plagiarized Dame Juliana Berner's work and insufficiently credited authorship due Charles Cotton for writing the fly-fishing chapters of *The Compleat Angler*.[24] Second to Walton, Cotton's authorship is now typically cited in contemporary editions of the book. Generally, fly-fishing enthusiasts approach such matters with a practical eye toward how essential to the sport's utility a proposed change or correction really is. "Aside from the aesthetics of fly-fishing tradition," contemporary angler and author John Merner writes, "traditions become such because they are functional."[25]

Fifth, Snyder argues that beyond tradition or technique, fly-fishing offers anglers the opportunity to quest for personal meaning, location and connection within context of the larger world[26] through an activity that is essentially restorative, although not completely without frustration. The popular bumper sticker, "A bad day's fishing is better than a good day of work" illustrates the point, particularly the desire for a pleasant, serene and possibly a literal experience of engaging with an unpredictable part of nature.

Many anglers consider fly-fishing techniques themselves as meditative which Snyder notes as a sixth point at which theology and the sport intersect. Fly-casting is the practice he believes that distinguishes the nature, aura and appeal of fly-fishing from other forms of sport fishing.[27] Fly-fishing author Harry Middleman considers the fly rod itself "a tool for conversation that speaks not in words but motion and energy"[28] that is capable of calling trout on the other end of the line to pick up. The angler's silent repetitive rhythmic action of aiming, throwing, waiting and retrieving each hopeful cast, ever alert for a response, channels desire of both mind and body into a posture of silent vigilance, ready to react to the smallest of signals from a fish. Sensing a fish telegraphing interest with a tug or a leap from the water, through the thread of a line grasped in one's fingers, activates the fly fisherman, who instantly tightens the line and pulls the rod up chest high to set the hook in the cartilage of the trout's jaw.

An important moment that Snyder overlooks concerns the experience of attempting to *land* a trout. Reeling in a fish embodies several qualities of transformative experience some consider mystical. In such fly-fishing moments what the angler had only *sensed* as a connection begins to pull, circle and gradually becomes a supple darting form the angler can see. The process of hoping to meet what one has tied into on the other end of the line without losing the connection quickly becomes a process beyond just hauling in a fish. The moment presents an opportunity to stay connected while deftly work with what's gyrating underneath the water in a way that minimizes harm. The moment affords the chance to encounter a lively part of creation whose nature is quite different from one's own. The experience of encountering a form of life that ordinarily lives unseen and inhabits a different corner of the world from human experience is quite thrilling.

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[24] Ibid., 904.
[25] Merwin, *The New American Trout Fishing,* 132.
[26] Snyder, "New Streams of Religion: Fly Fishing as a Lived, Religion of Nature," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* 907.
[27] Ibid., 909.
[28] Ibid., 910.

Playing or tiring the fish it sufficiently to coax the creature into an angler's net with little injury requires steady care that is no less important than casting itself. Retracting the line by keeping it taut with the rod held high overhead while reeling and netting a trout marks the "catch" phase of landing a trout. The stage ends with safely and expectantly waiting to meet the trout or salmon, by scooping it head first into a net so that the fish remains cornered yet underwater in its natural habitat. The second "release" stage of landing a trout is equally important for the hook must be removed while the fish remains in the water. Avoiding the delicate gills, the angler holds the fish facing upstream while stroking the trout's slippery lean back to restore it's balance. The angler then lets go of what was netted only minutes before. The experience may be every bit as spiritual an encounter as Snyder captures in his description of meditative casting. The occasion involves touching and freeing a squirming, beautifully colored trout by carefully stroking the creature beneath the water on its sides with one's fingers, only to release and watch it wriggle, zoom and disappear. The beauty of these fish is illustrated in this photograph of a rainbow trout just before being netted.

Samuel Snyder's multi-faceted seventh point which justifies the sport as a theological tradition closes the discussion of fly-fishing as "lived religion" or theology for every day. In it he engages three types of functions that characterize any religion. First identified by scholar David Chidester, religion's three characteristic functions are: forming community, focusing human desire and entering into human relations of exchange. Chidester argues that all faiths must "draw the divine or transcendent into doing important things within popular culture."[29]

[29] Ibid., 915.

Fly-fishing addresses the first function because the sport demonstrates "some form of community based upon literary, material, historical and metaphysical traditions where members associate themselves with an ancient religious order."[30] The previous discussions of fly-fishing's history, techniques, practices, anglers' hopes and shared sense of community all contribute to meeting Chidester's initial requirement for religion. Outdoor author Ted Leeson describes the inclusive communal nature of the sport this way:

> …fishing appeals most deeply as an approach to a web of relations that give shape and coherence to the natural world and so creates a religion of nature in which participants not only include humans but creatures themselves and the environments in which they live.[31]

Chidester's second function requires the objective of religious communities must not only focus on some desired eventual outcome but must also offer ongoing experience that participants feel a beneficial or rewarding process in itself.[32] Ending the day by having caught fish is nice but not necessary for fly-fishermen to feel their efforts were worthwhile. The opportunity to enjoy and engage in nature is typically reported as more important to anglers than a day's catch.[33] Despite repeated disappointments and failures, few other activities breed as much loyalty or persistence as fly-fishing.

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[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 916.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.

The third of Chidester's functions insists that in any religion, people must participate not merely to benefit, but must also be willing to contribute or give something back in gratitude for meaningful or rewarding experience the tradition provides.[34] At least a portion of anglers not only enjoy what fly-fishing offers but also collectively volunteer their efforts to preserve watershed areas, to restore natural fish habitats and so help to sustain environments that afford attractive fishing opportunities. Beyond altruistic intentions, Chidester argues that every religious community must identify what crucial difference the group believes itself equipped to make within contemporary culture. Strategic points at which groups believe they exert the greatest impact on a cause they believe crucial is called a key "place of exchange."[35] Among the angling community, that "place of exchange" is to engage in local conservation of nature's fly-fishing habitats against gradual threats that compromise their ecosystems, unspoiled beauty or jeopardize their future survival.

Of all of the concepts studied here as illustrative of reasons fly-fishing is appropriately considered a "lived religion," this last point is particularly crucial. For here anglers are challenged to translate their individual interests and concerns about fly-fishing's future into collective action that is concerted, strategic and persistent.

[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

Fly-fishing and Living Faithfully

Having explored practices and perspectives that illustrate "lived religion" among fly fishermen, how do anglers demonstrate faithfulness?

Isaak Walton and Charles Cotton first wrote about forsaking the bustle of life for an afternoon on the stream. The same idyllic concept continues to lure many to fly-fishing today. While in no way wanting to diminish the solitary delight of the sport, it is risky for anglers to remain unconcerned about their role in conserving the water, fish and natural environment in which fly-fishing takes place. Absent fuller consciousness and appreciation, fly-fishing becomes a consumptive pleasure that carelessly assumes that nature is limitless and ignores measures necessary to preserve such settings for future enjoyment. Trust that fishing environments automatically renew themselves is baseless. Faith in fly-fishing's future without conservation-oriented works endangers if not dooms the sport.

Enjoying fly-fishing while ignoring the preservation of fish and their environment demonstrates Chidester's point that one must not profit without actively contributing to one's belief system or lived theology. To both profit and contribute to fly-fishing requires locating and joining a community of other anglers who are also committed to responsible watershed conservation. Anglers must recognize that more than casual or periodic involvement is needed because the goal

requires specific, sustained commitment to waterway conservation. Fly-fishermen are now conducting environmental projects across the country. They can use help.

Known to anglers as TU, Trout Unlimited's mission is "conserving, protecting and restoring North America's coldwater fisheries and their watersheds."[36] All TU projects are dedicated to protecting, reconnecting, restoring and sustaining fish habitats. At times protection means leaving a territory alone and enforcing preservation "in courts of law and the court of public opinion" to ensure that trout and salmon remain intact, for example, in Northern New Mexico's wild Valle Vidal area or the Tongass Forest of Alaska.[37] TU's Eastern and Western Water Programs focus on dozens of strategic stream connections to ensure that water flow levels support fish migration in spite of disturbances due to drought, human diversions or dams that block fish routes, isolate fish and thus jeopardize their survival.[38] Trout Unlimited's restoration efforts start from this stark, sobering premise:

> Even if we protected all the remaining public lands in perpetuity, it still wouldn't be enough to ensure a future for native and wild trout and salmon. The only way to give fish a chance over time is to reclaim some of the land degraded through development and incompatible use.[39]

To counteract such potential catastrophe, TU chapter volunteers work on local watershed clean-up and improvement campaigns. Over eight hundred eighty-eight Embrace-A-Stream projects are currently underway to restore rivers and to build local constituencies designed to protect waterways into the future.[40] Under the Home Rivers Initiative, which began on New York's revered Beaverkill River,[41] TU staff and volunteers conduct long-term watershed restoration projects reconditioning waterways that flow through private areas. Successful techniques are replicated elsewhere.[42]

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[36] ____, "(Homepage): Protect, Reconnect, Restore, Sustain," *Trout Unlimited* [Internet Website: http://www.tu.org/site/c.kkLRJ7MSKtH/b.3022899/] (accessed 18 April 2008); available at http://www.tu.org/site/c.kkLRJ7MSKtH/b.3022897/k.BF82/Home.htm. Internet.

[37] ____, "Protect," *Trout Unlimited* [Internet Website: http://www.tu.org/site/c.kkLRJ7MSKtH/b.3022899/] (accessed 18 April 2008); available at http://www.tu.org/site/c.kkLRJ7MSKtH/b.3022897/k.BF82/Home.htm . Internet.

[38] ____, "Reconnect, " *Trout Unlimited*. [Internet Website: http://www.tu.org/site/c.kkLRJ7MSKtH/b.3022899/] (accessed 18 April 2008); available at http://www.tu.org/site/c.kkLRJ7MSKtH/b.3022897/k.BF82/Home.htm . Internet.

[39] ____, "Restore," *Trout Unlimited* [Internet Website: http://www.tu.org/site/c.kkLRJ7MSKtH/b.3022899/] (accessed 18 April 2008); available at http://www.tu.org/site/c.kkLRJ7MSKtH/b.3022897/k.BF82/Home.htm. Internet.

[40] ____, "Embrace-A-Stream, " *Trout Unlimited* [Internet Website: http://www.tu.org/site/c.kkLRJ7MSKtH/b.3022899/] (accessed 18 April 2008); available at http://www.tu.org/site/c.kkLRJ7MSKtH/b.3198137/k.9DD6/EmbraceAStream.htm) . Internet.

[41] ____. "Eastern Conservation, " *Trout Unlimited* [Internet Website http://www.tu.org/site/c.kkLRJ7MSKtH/b.3022899/] (accessed 18 April 2008); available at http://www.tu.org/site/c.kkLRJ7MSKtH/b.3022977/k.611F/Eastern_Conservation.htm) . Internet.

[42] ____. ""Home Rivers Initiative." *Trout Unlimited*. [Internet Website: http://www.tu.org/site/c.kkLRJ7MSKtH/b.3022899/] (accessed 18 April 2008); available at http://www.tu.org/site/c.kkLRJ7MSKtH/b.3198139/k.75CD/Home_Rivers_Initiative.htm) . Internet.

Trout Unlimited understands that members' progress toward preservation will not be maintained unless others are inspired to continue the work in the future. TU is investing heavily in public education initiatives, especially among young people. Currently, TU's initiatives include amending the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, Public Law 107-110, which is up for of the reauthorization, to include "No Child Left Inside" provisions as stipulated in forms H.R. 3036 and S. 1981 of the new Bill. The new legislation would designate funds to ensure children not only learn literacy and mathematics but also receive environmental education.[43] Outside of the political arena, additional local initiatives help kids understand and value the lifecycle and ecosystems of fish, These include TU's "Trout In the Classroom" projects in which school children initially hatch and raise trout in aquariums and later release them into coldwater streams.[44] Thousands of anglers whose enthusiasm extends beyond the thrills of the stream participate in projects like these to secure the sport's future survival. They are truly among fly-fishing's most faithful.

[43] Introduced by U.S. Representative John Sarbanes, Senator Jack Reed and over 25 cosponsors, this legislation, H.R. 3060 and S. 1981, amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Public Law 107-110) to include focus upon environmental education. ____, "Take Action to Support Outdoor Education, " [Internet Website: http://www.tu.org/site/c.kkLRJ7MSKtH/b.3022899/] (accessed 18 April 2008); available at http://www.tu.org/c.kkLRJ7MSKtH/b.3571205/siteapps/advocacy/ActionItem.aspx Internet.

[44] ____. "Trout In the Classroom, Connecting Students With their Watersheds, " *Trout Unlimited* [Internet Website: http://www.tu.org/site/c.kkLRJ7MSKtH/b.3022899/] (accessed 18 April 2008); available at (http://www.troutintheclassroom.org/site/c.juLTJ6MTKvH/b.1302851/k.BD7E/Home.htm . Internet.

Conclusions

The tradition and practices of fly-fishing offer numerous points at which to net deep theological readings. The following are several that bear highlighting. Though all are connected they are not necessarily discussed in sequence of importance.

- Essentially *in fly-fishing so in faith: nothing substitutes for learning the fundamentals as well as persistent, diligent practice. Both serve to keep one fully aware of where one stands at any given moment in order to remain ready and responsive in life's stream.* The goal is to employ disciplined practices to read and respond to changing conditions with agility; to detect and grasp subtle or surprising opportunities and to flexibly change tactics, positions and try alternatives. Common desire for meaningful experiences that connects us with life that remains a mystery until it emerges unexpectedly from another corner of creation is an aim common to both fly-fishing and faith. Typically anglers solicit such opportunities literally at arm's length, in isolated locations in manageable waters. In contrast, chances to encounter and influence one another's existence in daily life crowd in around us. Both circumstances demand similarly disciplined, agile initiative, responsiveness and persistence. While principles and practices of faith are valuable, only through application does one really learn, on dry as well as wet terrain, the relevance and usefulness of what one believes they know. While timing and reactions often prove imperfect and disappointing, the point is to cultivate resilience, to try again, to learn and not to turn away.

- *Moments of catch and release are not restricted to the stream. God daily casts appeals to humanity, offering sustaining love in a myriad of recognizable ways through which God tries to attract our own attention and response.* As a catch and release sport, fly-fishing is a consciously altered state of hunting whose chief interest is in connecting with another form of life without inflicting harmful injury. Many anglers make sensitive attempts to minimize the distress or peril involved when engaging fish at close range. Trust that God desires a similarly humane relationship with us helps to inform personal spiritual development and to sensitize us to the ways in which we influence and sustain relationships with other people and creation.

- *While often characterized as isolated and idyllic, at practical levels, faith and fly-fishing involve serious work and constant alertness to changes in surroundings, including warnings of possible danger.* Being part of a group potentially helps one stay located and learning faithfully within the context of others, all of whom also desire sufficient space to learn and grow for themselves. Developing practices and beliefs of faith on one's own, particularly as a novice, leaves an individual vulnerable to self-selecting only those religious views that are appealing, comforting or confidence-building. False or impoverished sense of immunity from problems may arise, for everyone, including religious people, must face common risks and challenges. Participating as part of an group of enthusiasts with similar interests yet different experiences and insights, builds trust and relational opportunities to learn, question, grow and alert one another to hazards, that include spiritual complacency, rigidity or unexplored beliefs.

- *Similar to the experience of anglers, what compels people to persist in faith, when the benefits feel elusive, aren't graspable and don't preclude facing disappointment or risks? The answer is found in the hope that some hidden insight may emerge, even if graspable for only a moment, yet long enough to inspire, restore or alter meaning in our lives.* From a religious perspective such moments are not necessarily outside but rather embedded in the mainstream of everyday life. We learn to recognize them only if we practice responsiveness to challenges and opportunities as they appear right in front of us. Such experiences are potentially transformative. They may not necessarily be pretty, simply powerful. They may be loud and public, or quietly profound and influential. Such moments may not necessarily reinforce, but rather, jar us to redefine the limits of our understanding and commitments.

Transformation may take place collectively as well as individually. On a personal level, transformation involves renegotiating boundaries between ordinary and extraordinary experience. On a collective level, transformation involves constantly refreshing capacity, flexibility and commitment to exert the greatest influence on that key human benefit the group has defined as their crucial cause. Both individuals and groups must adjust as influences appear and exert strength in areas that may well test their limits. In both individual or collective circumstances, the point for faithful people is to seek and cultivate transformative experiences

by looking for and participating in them. Lived faith requires patient desire, persistence and a vigilant eye to respond to surprises and to navigate challenges or hazards, just like fly-fishing.

- *Fly-fishing has survived since Biblical times in part because anglers' enthusiasm, through the centuries extended beyond personal fulfillment, to cultivating, adapting and preserving the experience for current and future generations to know and appreciate.* What approaches used to nurture good practice and love of fly-fishing might be transferable to Christian religious education? Offering individual attention, learning interactively at a pace that gradually builds basic sense of competence and practicing repetitiously in an environment that is not competitive or boring all contribute to learning the basics. Ultimately, nothing beats learning first hand from a seasoned guide or group with no attitude of superiority. Questions students express provide clues to their interests which teaching guides must address while also providing basic religious education in a manner that encourages personal practice, further exploration and everyday application. Faith community members, whether new or seasoned, need ongoing encouragement to continue to explore, to express and to raise questions concerning faith. Faith develops and transforms us gradually as we cast about during the course of daily experience. Our spiritual lives emerge as we encounter surprising discoveries or challenges over the course of a lifetime that are embedded in circumstances perhaps hidden at the moment and yet constantly surround us. Whether small or large, all such opportunities require agile engagement and faithful response.

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Appendix A
Varieties of Insects and Aquatic Forms Important to Fly-fishing

Type	**Mayflies**	**Caddis Flies**	**Flat-Winged Flies**	**Stoneflies and Damselflies**	**Terrestrials**	**Aquatic Forms**
Description	Up-Winged Dayflies	Aquatic Insects	Mosquito- Like Flies	Flat-Winged Large Hard-Bodied Flies	Bugs that Hop or Crawl	Water-Inhabitors
Classification	*Order Ephemeroptera*	*Order Trichoptera*	*Order Diptera*	*Orders Plecoptera and Odonata*	*Multiple Orders*	*Multiple Orders*
Stages of Development (* = stage especially important for fly-fishing)	Egg ↓ Nymph * ↓ Dunn * ↓ Spinner *	Egg ↓ Larvae * ↓ Pupae ↓ Adult	Egg ↓ Larvae * ↓ Pupae * ↓ Adult	Egg ↓ Nymph * ↓ Adult	Egg ↓ Larvae ↓ Pupae ↓ Adult *	Larvae ↓ Adult *
Distribution by Water Condition	Wide distribution in running and still water.	Wide distribution in running and still water.	Primarily in still water.	Found in lakes and slow moving river stretches.	Found on river banks near still water.	Most often found in swift water.
Seasonal Importance	Useful during spring and early summer.	Useful spring through autumn.	Useful in late spring and all summer.	Useful during brief period in spring.	Particularly useful when aquatic insects are not hatching.	Particularly useful during early fishing season before insects hatch in quantity.
Notes:	• Nymphs develop in 12 months in mud or on plants. • Duns emerge as winged adults with a 12-20 hour lifespan. • Adults swarm, mate then fall, spinning into water	• Larvae build 'homes' on fragments floating on water surfaces to collect prey and develop from pupae to adulthood.	• Most diverse and numerous of trout food forms.	• Two insect forms at opposite ends of fly-fishing spectrum: • Stoneflies=swift water; damselflies = slow moving water.	• Often blown into streams by wind from trees, bushes and tall grasses close to water's edge.	• Wide variety of forms include: water fleas, diving beetles, snails, and alder larva.

Sources: Charles Jardine, The *Classic Guide to Fly Fishing For Trout*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1991), 38-49.
John. Merwin, *The New American Trout Fishing*. (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1994), 174-180.