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### June 4, 2013: “In our family, there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing.”

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Title: "In our family, there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing."

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6/4/2013—This quotation is from Norman Maclean's book, *A River Runs Through It*. There is a website where you can read the quote in context. You will see there that it is not obvious what Maclean means. It does not mean that in any sense fly fishing and Christianity were competitors. The father who taught the boys fly fishing was a Presbyterian minister and former Marine. There was no fly fishing on Sunday, the Lord's day. It is closer to say that the truths revealed in Christianity, because they are truths, can be seen in any other great and beautiful endeavor, especially to those who know how to look because they have been taught these truths from the Bible. As the author puts it, man by nature is a mess and has fallen from an original state of grace. Only by intuiting God's rhythms could man regain power and beauty. These rhythms were on offer in fly fishing. Until man is redeemed, he will tend to miss this rhythm. He will try to attain power without recovering grace, without recovering rhythm—and he will fail. And this is true of any great art. Now let us think about these words in these activities from the point of view of Brian Leiter. Fly fishing is not literally being proposed by the author as a new religion. From Leiter's point of view, fly fishing is more akin to the rural boy who must carry his dagger. You can distinguish between fly fishing and Christianity, but they are of equal value. It is not an impossible account. But it does not capture what the author is trying to show. Fly fishing takes up where Christianity ends as a kind of moving illustration. It is a way of life that can express the truths of Christianity, though it might not. And I suppose the author would agree that one might have the spirituality of fly fishing without having first learned the truths of Christianity. It might be something like Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. I think my approach is closer to the author's insight than is that of Leiter. You could be religious through fly fishing. There is no valid way to distinguish between them, if fly fishing is in fact a spiritual exercise.