

THE RELEVANCE OF WITTGENSTEIN'S PRIVATE LANGUAGE ARGUMENT FOR SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES: A CASE STUDY OF THE INNER WITNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

INTRODUCTION

The concept of language is one of the main issues of philosophical investigations. It is inextricably linked to the concepts of knowledge, reason, meaning,¹ and truth.² The concept of meaning raises the question of the relationship between ourselves and our language.³ The concept of truth raises the question of the relationship between our language and the facts they describe.⁴ Language is a cultural component more or less standardized which, being learned and shared by a plurality of persons, serves to constitute them into a particular and distinct collectivity.⁵ In spite of the corporate nature of language, people may speak of private language in different ways. First, private language is understood as a code adopted by one person, or group of persons, for their exclusive use. For example, the codes used in the army.

¹Norman Malcolm notes that “Wittgenstein’s rejection of the intrinsically private, inner object is a consequence of his new conception of meaning,” Norman Malcolm, “Wittgenstein, Ludwig Josef Johann,” *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Vol. 8 ed. Paul Edwards (New York: The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, 1967), 339.

²Simon W. Blackburn, “Language, history of the philosophy of,” in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. Ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 455.

³*Ibid.*, 458.

⁴*Ibid.*, 454.

⁵The important aspect of language to note here is its corporate nature. Cf. Guy Rocher, *Introduction à la Sociologie Générale. 1. L’Action Sociale*. (n.p.: Editions HMH, 1968). Guy Rocher speaks of culture as a whole.

This is not really a private language, however, but rather a private use of public language.⁶

Second, private language is a language that no one other than the speaker could understand even if all the experiences of the speaker were available to others.⁷ Finally, private language is a language that cannot be taught to or learned by anyone other than the speaker, because it is a language which a particular person employs to refer only to his private experiences. This is the notion which Wittgenstein has in mind when he speaks about private language.⁸

Wittgenstein writes: “The individual words of this language are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language.”⁹ “The language which describes my inner experiences and which only I myself can understand.”¹⁰ The main question is: Would a private language be thinkable?¹¹ The treatment of this question, called the private language problem or private language argument, holds a great place in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*. It is

⁶Ashok Vohra, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Mind* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1986), 34.

⁷*Ibid.*, 34.

⁸*Ibid.*, 35.

⁹Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* 3rd edition Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1958), 243.

¹⁰Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 256.

¹¹Price Jeffrey Thomas Price, *Language and Being in Wittgenstein’s ‘Philosophical Investigations’* (The Hague, The Netherlands: Mouton, 1973), 51.

connected with what he says about the knowledge of the sensations of another and with one's own sensations.¹²

This paper aims to consider the relevance of the private language argument for inner religious experiences. We contend that Wittgenstein's private language argument can be applied to dissipate some misunderstandings on the nature of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. The first part deals with the background of Wittgenstein's private language argument. The second part traces the flow of his argumentation. The third part explores the possible application of this argument in religious experiences. What can be the relevance of this private language argument for inner religious experiences and particularly for the inner witness of the Holy Spirit? Are there criteria for judging such experiences?

Background of Wittgenstein's Private Language Problem

Ideas and concepts seldom originate in a vacuum. They usually stand out against a background which illuminates them. Wittgenstein's private language problem is no exception. His treatment of the subject must be understood in light of the then well-accepted *doctrine of mentalese*,¹³ the writings of Russell, Schlick and the Vienna Circle, Locke,¹⁴ and his own

¹²John Wisdom, "Wittgenstein on 'Private Language'," *Ludwig Wittgenstein Philosophy and Language* ed. Alice Ambrose and Morris Lazerowitz (London: George Allen and Unwin LTD, 1972), 26.

¹³The doctrine of *mentalese*, is "the idea that thoughts 'are a special variety of linguistic expression of a private language, which we translate into the expression of a generally accessible language'." Garth Hallett, *A Companion to Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations,"* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977), 306. Hallett notes that thinkers as Frege, Aquinas, Augustine, James, Russell, Moore, Plato and Wittgenstein himself (*Notebooks*, 82) are some of those who espoused some version of the doctrine.

¹⁴Hacker underscores that the almost perfect example of a private language of the kind Wittgenstein had in mind is that described by Locke in his exposition of the elements of our

previous writings.¹⁵ The common feature of these approaches is their skepticism toward the knowledgeability of other minds. It may be summarized under the form of a polysyllogism:

- Each person has only his own experience. Anyone who has a sensation knows that he has it because he feels it; and whatever can be known to exist by being felt cannot be known to exist in any other way.¹⁶
- We truly know what we directly experience or deductively infer from experience.¹⁷ “I can only *believe* that someone else is in pain, but I *know* it if I am.”¹⁸
- The proper and necessary means of coming to know what sensations another person is having is to feel (have) that person’s sensations.¹⁹
- No one can feel, experience or know another person’s sensations.²⁰ We cannot feel another’s pain, nor have the self-same visual impression of a color, and vice versa.²¹

thought and language in Books II and III of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion: Wittgenstein on Philosophy and the Metaphysics of Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 224.

¹⁵Garth Hallett, *A Companion to Wittgenstein’s “Philosophical Investigations,”* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977), 307.

¹⁶Vohra, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Mind*, 39.

¹⁷Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 243, 246-250, 272, 303; The private language of which I alone am master is the only one in which one can make inerrant assertions. Russell, *Logic*, 130 quoted in Hallett, *A Companion to Wittgenstein’s “Philosophical Investigations,”* 308.

¹⁸Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 246, 303; Cf. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, 232.

¹⁹Vohra, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Mind*, 39.

²⁰Harold Morick in the introduction to *Wittgenstein and the Problem of Other Minds* ed. Harold Morick (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1981), xiv; Vohra, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Mind*, 39.

- Private language is, therefore, possible.²²

How does the private language argument stand out from this background?

Wittgenstein's Criticism of the Private Language

Wittgenstein's attack against the private language theory is complex and manifold.²³

He does not intend to establish a philosophical thesis or theory of the impossibility of private language.²⁴ He is less interested in theory than in therapy,²⁵ that is to say, in the dissolution of the view through linguistic analysis.²⁶ He considers that the notion of a private language rests on two fundamental mistakes: (1) mistake about the nature of experience; and (2) mistake about the nature of language."²⁷ His treatment may be epitomized in a threefold analysis of: the nature of experience, the nature of language, and the concept of criterion.

²¹Thus, "a man's percepts are private to himself: what I see, no one else sees; what I hear, no one else hears; what I touch, no one else touches; and so on." Bertrand Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy* (London, 1927), 144 and Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* 3rd edition Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1958), §253; quoted in Hallett, *A Companion to Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations,"* 307; Morick in the introduction to *Wittgenstein and the Problem of Other Minds*, xiv.

²²Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 243, 256-61, 269, 275-80, 293; Schlick and Vienna Circle; Cf. Hallett, *A Companion to Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations,"* 313.

²³Morick in the introduction to *Wittgenstein and the Problem of Other Minds*, xv.

²⁴Hallett, *A Companion to Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations,"* 306.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶Morick in the introduction to *Wittgenstein and the Problem of Other Minds*, xiv.

²⁷Vohra, *Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Mind*, 38.

Nature of Experience

In order to refute the belief that experiences are private, Wittgenstein explores the two senses of 'privacy.' The first sense of 'privacy' has to do with *knowledge* (epistemic privacy). In this sense, something is epistemically private to me if and only if I alone can know about it.²⁸ The second sense of privacy has to do with *possession* (privacy of ownership). In this sense something is private to me if and only if I can have it.²⁹ The first sense of privacy may be abbreviated as *incommunicability* and the second sense as *inalienability*. Therefore, the question, 'Are sensations private?', breaks up into two sub-questions: (1) 'Are sensations incommunicable?' (2) 'Are sensations inalienable?'³⁰

Incommunicability of Sensations

The incommunicability of sensations means that no one can know what sensations another person is having.³¹ Each person possesses his own exemplar, but that nobody knows whether other people also have *this* or something else."³² To Wittgenstein, the assertion, "Only I can know whether I am really in pain; another person can only surmise it," is "in one way wrong, and in another nonsense."³³ So is the idea that nobody knows my pain with the

²⁸Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 246; Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, 231.

²⁹Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, 222.

³⁰Vohra, *Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Mind*, 38-39.

³¹Vohra, *Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Mind*, 39.

³²Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 272. Cf. Hallett, *A Companion to Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations"*, 314.

³³Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 246.

same certainty with which I know it myself.³⁴ “It makes sense to say about other people that they doubt whether I am in pain; but not to say it about myself.”³⁵ Wittgenstein agrees with his predecessors that immediate, personal experiences are immune to doubt. For him, nonetheless, it is not because our knowledge is so sure.³⁶ To him, the phrase “I know” must satisfy two conditions to be qualified as an expression of certainty: (1) the assertion attached to “I know” must be dubitable; (2) the question ‘How do you know?’ can be asked³⁷ to add something to the certainty of the assertion.³⁸ Wittgenstein notes that in the case of the first person psychological assertion, ‘I am in pain,’ it is psychologically and logically impossible to doubt whether I am in pain. Therefore, it is senseless to talk about knowledge and certainty of ‘I am in pain.’³⁹ Since there is no place for doubt, the question ‘How do you know?’ cannot be asked.⁴⁰ Consequently, the thesis of the incommunicability of private language is false.⁴¹

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., p.221; Hallett, *A Companion to Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations,"* 317.

³⁷Vohra, *Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Mind*, 41.

³⁸Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 246; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. Wright. Trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 243: “One says ‘I know’ when one is ready to give compelling grounds. ‘I know’ relates to a possibility of demonstrating the truth. Whether someone knows something can come to light, assuming that he is convinced of it. But if what he believes is such a kind that the grounds that he can give are not surer than his assertion, then he cannot say that he knows what he believes.”

³⁹Vohra, *Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Mind*, 42-43.

⁴⁰Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 148; Vohra, *Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Mind*, 43.

⁴¹Morick in the introduction to *Wittgenstein and the Problem of Other Minds*, xxi.

Inalienability of Sensations

The inalienability of sensations raises the question of the criterion of possessing pain; ‘Which are my pains?’ and the criterion of identity of pain: ‘What counts as criterion of identity here?’⁴² According to Wittgenstein, the use of ‘my pain’ rests on two mistakes: (1) It supposes that only the person who is in pain can feel it, and (2) it supposes that the word ‘mine’ is a possessive of ownership as ‘my’ is in ‘He has my coat.’⁴³ Wittgenstein’s point here is that, in the case of a material object, the possessive adjective denotes the owner while in the case of sensations, it is sufficient to know who is in pain.⁴⁴ Wittgenstein rejects the thesis of the inalienability of sensations. It is possible for two persons to have the same pain.⁴⁵

Wittgenstein’s criticism of the meaning of ‘privacy’ leads to the conclusion that sensations are neither incommunicable nor inalienable, therefore, they are not private.⁴⁶

Private Language

The second mistake of the proponents of ‘private language’ is a mistake about the nature of language. The essential characteristics of a private language can be summarized in four points: (1) The words of the language are to refer to what can only be known to the

⁴²Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 253; Vohra, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Mind*, 46.

⁴³Vohra, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Mind*, 47.

⁴⁴Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Book* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960), 67, 69; Vohra, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Mind*, 47-48. Morick in the introduction to *Wittgenstein and the Problem of Other Minds*, xviii-xvix.

⁴⁵Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 253; Vohra, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Mind*, 50.

⁴⁶Vohra, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Mind*, 52.

speaker. (2) The words of the language are to refer to the speaker's immediate private sensations. (3) Another person cannot understand the language.⁴⁷ (4) The private language cannot have a single word in common with the public language.⁴⁸

According to Wittgenstein, if I know only from my own case what "pain" means, "I know only what I call that, not what anyone else does."⁴⁹ Some object that they can give themselves a private ostensive definition by associating each recurrence of a sensation with the letter "S."⁵⁰ Wittgenstein replies on two grounds. First, if there were no outward expression of pain, it would be impossible to teach children the word toothache,⁵¹ since I cannot be sure that they apply the word to the right private object.⁵² Second, you name something when through this name people can identify the bearer of the name. If the sensation named "S" is private, that is, nobody knows it, then nobody can identify what reality "S" points to. Consequently, you are not naming, and "S" has no function.⁵³ Besides, how shall

⁴⁷Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, 222; Vohra, *Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Mind*, 35.

⁴⁸From these elements Ashok deduces the following definition: "Private language is a language that refers to the experiences of which only the speaker is aware and of which it is not merely the case that it is not understood by anyone other than the speaker, but more, that it is logically impossible that it should be understood by anyone other than the speaker," Vohra, *Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Mind*, 35, 37.

⁴⁹Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 347; Cf. Morick in the introduction to *Wittgenstein and the Problem of Other Minds*, xv.

⁵⁰Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 258; Vohra, *Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Mind*, 52.

⁵¹Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 257.

⁵²Morick in the introduction to *Wittgenstein and the Problem of Other Minds*, xv.

⁵³Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 258-260, 271.

we use the concept “S” in the future?⁵⁴ The only criterion for identifying two recurrences of sensations as “S” is the user’s ability to remember the connection between “S” and the object. Human memory does not serve as sure criterion since it can fail.⁵⁵ If the use of “S” is justified by associating it with a public referent, then “S” is not a word in a private language.⁵⁶ The necessary condition for a word to have a meaning is that there be rules governing its use, and the possibility of checking whether the rules are followed.⁵⁷ Following a rule is a practice, therefore, one cannot follow a rule “privately.”⁵⁸

Wittgenstein holds that anyone who attempts to use a private language not only fails to communicate his meaning to others, but also does not have a meaning to communicate even to himself; in other words, he does not succeed in saying anything at all.⁵⁹

The Concept of Criterion

Wittgenstein categorically states: “An ‘inner process’ stands in need of outward criteria.”⁶⁰ “Behavior is a *criterion* for an inner process.”⁶¹ The expressions of an emotion or state (gestures, tones, etc.) belong to the very concept of the emotion or state; they are the

⁵⁴Vohra, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Mind*, 61.

⁵⁵Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 258, 265; Vohra, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Mind*, 61.

⁵⁶Vohra, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Mind*, 65.

⁵⁷Morick in the introduction to *Wittgenstein and the Problem of Other Minds*, xvi; David Pole, *The Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (London: The Athlone Press, 1958), 75.

⁵⁸Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 202; Cf. Norman Malcolm, “Wittgenstein, Ludwig Josef Johann,” 339.

⁵⁹Vohra, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Mind*, 38.

⁶⁰Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 579-580.

outer criteria of which the “inner” has need.”⁶² The game someone plays with himself is called a game if it resembles a public game.⁶³ The private language, to be called language, should resemble a public language. If it resembles a public language, then it is not a private one, but rather one of the variants of public languages. Pole accurately summarizes Wittgenstein’s point on private language: “The language in which we speak of private experience is in fact part of a larger, public language, and is learnt in social contexts.”⁶⁴

The concept of private language thus unpacked and elucidated leads us to the question of its relevance for inner religious experience.

Relevance of the Private Language Argument for the Inner Witness of the Holy Spirit

D. F. Strauss called the inner witness of the Holy Spirit the “Achilles’ heel” of Protestant theology.⁶⁵ One may, in fact, wonder: Is it not mere subjectivism? How does one know that he is dealing with the Holy Spirit, and not mere psychology or a demonic influence? How can one verify an inward experience?⁶⁶ Can other believers know our experience with the Holy Spirit or is it purely private? These questions or objections to the inner witness of the Holy Spirit are of paramount importance. It is easy to confuse our inner

⁶¹Morick in the introduction to *Wittgenstein and the Problem of Other Minds*, xxiii.

⁶²Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 580; Hallett, *A Companion to Wittgenstein’s “Philosophical Investigations,”* 29-30.

⁶³Hallett, *A Companion to Wittgenstein’s “Philosophical Investigations,”* 319.

⁶⁴David Pole, *The Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (London: The Athlone Press, 1958), 65.

⁶⁵Quoted in P. K. Jewett, “Holy Spirit,” *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney and Steven Barabas. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 195.

voice, the voice of our desires and ambitions, with the voice of the Holy Spirit. We need safeguards to avoid aberrations. Théo Preiss accurately points out that “the free examination, understood as license accorded to each one to open his Bible and to interpret it according to his own lights, has opened the door to all sorts of abuses, and led to the worst aberrations.”⁶⁷

Following the model of the private language argument, we will analyze the concept of the privacy of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. We will conclude this section with an examination of possible outward criteria.

The Privacy of the Witness of the Holy Spirit

What does it mean to say that the inner witness of the Holy Spirit is a private experience? Taking into consideration the two senses of privacy, epistemic privacy and privacy of ownership, we may ask two questions: Is the inner witness of the Holy Spirit incommunicable? Is it inalienable? An affirmative answer to these questions implies: (1) that I alone can experience the inner witness of the Holy Spirit; (2) that nobody else can experience it; (3) that there is no outward behavior in which this inner experience is manifested. Christian living and the Bible reject such a conclusion. Two main arguments may be brought forth against the privacy of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

First, If the inner witness of the Holy Spirit was private, i.e., incommunicable and inalienable, nobody would know what the phrase “inner witness of the Holy Spirit” means. The recognition of this fact as a religious experience denies its privacy and reveals its public

⁶⁶Jewett, “Holy Spirit,” *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 196.

⁶⁷Théo Preiss, “The Inner Witness of the Holy Spirit: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit and Scripture,” *Interpretation* Volume VII no 3 (July 1953), 260.

nature. Second, the Bible clearly teaches that the inner witness of the Holy Spirit is not the privilege of an individual or of a spiritual elite. It is the daily life style of every Christian. The Spirit of God dwells (*oikei*) in them, they have (*echei*) the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9). This Spirit bears witness with (*summarturei*) their spirit that they are sons of God (Rom 8:15-16), and that the Scripture is the word of God. My experience with the Holy Spirit is, therefore, mine in that God deals with each person individually, but it is also ours in that my brothers and sisters in Christ share the same experience (Phil 2:1).

Can we use the phrase “I know” with this experience? The question is difficult, but we believe that the question “How do you know?” makes sense in this case. It is not because one needs to learn or find out that he has an experience. I cannot doubt that I had a religious experience. It makes sense, however, to ask someone how he knows he is dealing with the Holy Spirit and not with an evil spirit. This question rises or falls on the basis of evidence. It is possible to have a false religious assurance (1 John 1:8). There are lying visions (Col 3:16-18). There are fleshly behaviors with an appearance of wisdom and godliness (Col 3:21-23; 2 Tim 3:5). These facts confirm the need of an external evidence to validate my inner experience.

Outward Authenticating Criteria of the Inner Witness of the Holy Spirit

The inner witness of the Holy Spirit is a private experience in the sense that a particular individual is the object of this experience. But it would be an error to think that nobody in the Church can understand or judge such an experience. The Bible confirms that

our ‘private experience’ with the Holy Spirit stands in need of outward criteria.⁶⁸ The phrase “inner witness of the Holy Spirit” includes the necessity of evidence. “The office of a ‘witness’ is to bear testimony or supply evidence for the purpose of adducing proof.”⁶⁹ The Spirit of God supplies evidence to the Christians that they are sons of God. This witness results in an inward assurance of their state.⁷⁰ Stott accurately writes: “Thus radical holiness, fearless freedom, filial prayerfulness and the hope of the glory are four characteristics of the children of God who are indwelt and led by the Spirit of God. It is by these evidences that he witness to us that we are God’s children.”⁷¹ In addition to this individual aspect, the Bible reveals that some outward criteria can be used to judge inner spiritual experiences. First, the criterion of the right confession. John brings forth this criterion to prove whether the spirits are from God or not. Those who are led by the Spirit by God confess the divinity of Christ incarnate.⁷² On the basis of John’s words, Preiss firmly asserts: “The *criterion* thanks to which we recognize the authenticity of the inner testimony is then exterior...”⁷³ Jewett adds: “The movement of the argument, then, is from the inward conviction to the outward, external,

⁶⁸Some of the criteria are certainly difficult to verify, but the presence of difficult criteria is much better than the total absence of criteria.

⁶⁹Arthur W. Pink, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 125. Commenting Rom 8:16 Trites writes: “Here the Spirit functions as an advocate in the inner court of the believer, testifying to his or her adoption into the divine family,” A. A. Trites, “Witness,” *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1993), 975.

⁷⁰Rom 8:15-17; Acts 24:16; 2 Cor 1:12; Cf. Pink, *The Holy Spirit*, 125.

⁷¹John Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1994), 230.

⁷²1 John 4:1-3, 15; Cf. Jewett, “Holy Spirit,” 196.

historical event of the Incarnation.”⁷⁴ Second, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believers’ life is manifested through love.⁷⁵ Third, the inner witness of the Holy Spirit is manifested outwardly through submission to the Bible. “The inner testimony ...sends the believer back to the external testimony, which alone is normative. It adds nothing to the written revelation.”⁷⁶ Fourth, the interpretation of Scripture is governed by rules. “The remedy for privatistic excess lies in listening for the address of the Spirit inwardly in a way that corresponds with the written Word received and celebrated in the historic Christian community.”⁷⁷ The inner witness of the Holy Spirit is in strict accord with the teaching of the Bible.⁷⁸ All so-called inner witness of the Holy Spirit which contradicts the Scripture is to be rejected. Fifth, the inner witness of the Holy Spirit is manifested through a new relation with God, a relation of sonship and confidence which will be manifest in an outward behavior.⁷⁹

⁷³Théo Preiss, “The Inner Witness of the Holy Spirit,” 278.

⁷⁴Jewett, “Holy Spirit,” 196. Jewett adds that this is an adequate criterion only for the believers.

⁷⁵Rom 5:5; 1 John 4:7-14.

⁷⁶Théo Preiss, “The Inner Witness of the Holy Spirit,” 261.

⁷⁷Thomas C. Oden, following Hilary; *Systematic Theology: Volume Three. Life in the Spirit* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1992), 75.

⁷⁸Pink, *The Holy Spirit*, 128.

⁷⁹Rom 8:15-17; Gal 4:6-7; Cf. Eduard Schweizer, *The Holy Spirit*, trans. Reginald H. and Ilse Fuller (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1946, 1980), 86; Pink writes: “If then, our beliefs, our feelings, our assurance, tend to exalt depraved nature, depreciate Divine grace, or lead to a licentious life, they are certainly not of God. But if they have quite the opposite tendency, convincing us of our wretchedness by nature, making Christ more precious to us, and leading us into the duties He enjoins, they are of the Holy Spirit,” Pink, *The Holy Spirit*, 129-130.

CONCLUSION

The inner witness of the Holy Spirit or any other genuine spiritual experience does not reduce Christian life to a dialogue between the individual and his God. There is a corporate dimension. The right understanding of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit prevents two dangerous extremes: illuminism and skepticism. The first leads to the neglect or even the disdain for the written word and the rules of its interpretation in favor of so-called personal revelation or private witness of the Holy Spirit. Its outward manifestations are spiritual pride, fanaticism, and troubles in the church. The second leads to a rejection of any kind of creditable testimony, to always ask for more evidence.⁸⁰ The communicability, alienability, and existence of criteria of authenticity of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit prove that it is not a private experience. The Bible encourages the judging of inner experiences (1 Cor 14:29; 1 John 4:1). The task of discerning between the influence of the Spirit and the influence of the evil one is sometimes so difficult that the gift of distinguishing the spirits become indispensable (1 Cor 12:10).

⁸⁰Cf. Oden, *Systematic Theology*, 75.

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