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Simone Weil: The Reluctant Convert

Richard John Penaskovic

Introduction

Simone Weil's conversion and thought simply defy categorization. Simone was a mystic, a mathematician, a scientist, a writer, an idealist, and a scholar of the Greek and Hindu classics rolled into one. Her thought speaks equally to non-believers and atheists as it does to members of the world religions. Simone thinks more in terms of "both-and" as does Hebrew and Confucian thought, rather than dualistically, in terms of "either-or," as did Hellenistic thought as found in Plato and the Neo-Platonist tradition. Although Simone's thought is complex, it still manages to possess a wonderful unity and coherence that serve to tie her categories together snugly. Weil's thought reminds me of my grandson's Lego set where each piece interlocks with other pieces to form a coherent whole.

Weil makes good use of similes and metaphors in her writings, giving specificity and concreteness to her abstract, and, at times, abstruse thoughts. Weil 's thinking commences with ideas or concepts like affliction or attention. Her experiences in life are then the point of departure for her speculative theories. In the *Lectures on Philosophy Weil* notes that "Our perception of the external world constitutes the essential relation between us and what is outside us."[1]

Some of her writings are particularly challenging to the reader, for example, her *Notebooks*. There her ideas are often elliptical and obscure. Some of her pet notions are mentioned but not fully explained. They are then taken up in some of her other writings and further elucidated. This probably accounts for the various interpretations given to her writings by various scholars who have commented on her works.[2]

[1] Simone Weil, *Lectures on Philosophy*, trans. H. Price (Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 52. I wish to thank Vance Morgan and Richard Shields for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

[2] Dorothee Beyer, *Sinn und Genese des Begriffs "Decreation' bei Simone Weil*. (Altenberge: Oros Verlag, 1992), p.16.

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My paper deals with Simone Weil's "conversion." Part I gives a short introduction to Weil's *Weltanschauung* or thought-world, one that is highly idiosyncratic. It contains a brief description of such words as affliction, necessity, obedience, affliction, and "decreation." Part II raises the question, "Why did Weil refuse to enter the Roman Catholic Church?" In Part III I offer some reflections on Weil's thought, with special reference to her conversion. The paper ends with a short conclusion.

I. Affliction, Necessity, Obedience, and Decreation

Simone Weil ranks as one of the most creative philosophical minds in the twentieth century. By "creative" I mean the ability to transcend the confines of convention and Weil does this on practically every page she wrote. The furniture in her mental world always takes a unique and arresting shape. Although widely read in the classics whether Eastern or Western, Weil uses them to chart her own path. Simone Weil makes a distinction between three different spheres or domains. First, there exists the region or domain completely beyond human control. It includes everything that will occur or happen entirely independent of human activity, or those things that God in her wisdom allows to happen. Weil observes that one ought to feel God's strong hand in every external occurrence, such as a tornado, the death of a child, or a terminal illness.[3]

Second, Weil speaks of the domain or region of things that are entirely natural. In this particular domain we are called to fulfill our particular duties or responsibilities in life. This domain corresponds to what Hinduism calls dharma or the fulfillment of one's obligations in life. The word, *dharma,* may also be translated as "religion," as understood in the West. The word has special significance in the *Bhagavad Gita* where *dharma* helps humanity come to terms with any problem encountered in the journey of life.[4]

In the third domain we find those things not totally independent of humanity. Here we are to carry out our duties in life by loving God *attentively.* The more we love God with attention, the more we feel the pressure of doing what God would have us do. When this pressure builds up within us and takes possession of our entire being, then we have indeed reached the plane of perfection. Most people believe that paying attention is purely a matter of will-power. Weil does not buy such a view. Weil sees attention as connected with both desire and

[3] Simone Weil, *Waiting on God.* trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1951), p. 13.

[4] Thomas Berry, *Religions of India: Hinduism, Yoga, Buddhism, (Chambersberg, PA: Anima Publications, 1992), p. 33.*

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consent. She opines that extreme attention is part and parcel of our creative faculty and she goes so far as to equate extreme attention with prayer. In paying attention our ego disappears. Weil looks upon studying as a "form of the gymnastics of the attention." which gives us "an aptitude for prayer."[5]

One cannot understand Weil's thought without considering her notion of necessity. For Weil necessity and obedience are correlative concepts. Necessity means the way God has set up the universe, the rigorous mechanical order at work in the entire cosmos. Weil speaks of necessity as blind in that it's operative in the entire hierarchy of being from raw matter to humans. Humanity is subject to blind necessity much like we are susceptible to certain diseases. We cannot control the way the world works, subject as it is to physical and mathematical laws. Necessity has been created by God and may be understood as the particular way things evolve or unfold in the universe.[6]

Although we are subject to the laws that govern the universe, nevertheless we can make God the treasure we seek by perfect obedience or, as the Greeks say, *hypermone*, understood as remaining where one is and remaining completely motionless. For Weil those who are perfectly obedient are a unique manifestation of the divine presence in the cosmos. In this connection Weil distinguishes between two different types of obedience. One may obey either the force of gravity or the relationship of things.[7] In Weil's thought-world grace and gravity are the two forces that rule the universe. Weil notes that gravity may be seen as the power or force that takes us from God. By creating the world, God has withdrawn from it leaving us to deal with the law of gravity. Hence we find this law analogously in every sphere of existence. Gravity impels us to assert ourselves using all our power to buttress our existence as fragile vessels, opposed and apart from God.[8]

Only grace given us from on high penetrates the core of our being just as a drop of water passes through geological strata without disturbing its innermost structure. Weil adds that grace decreates us whereas, on the other hand, the law of gravity is the work of creation. Through love we are capable of being anything in order that God may become everything. That is, we must die to ourselves and become defenseless to the "fangs of life", accepting emptiness as

[5] Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Arthur Wills (New York: Octagon Books, 1979) p. 173.

[6] Eric O. Springsted, *Simone Weil* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1998) pp. 71–74.

[7] Gravity and Grace, p. 96.

[8] Ibid., p. 20.

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our lot in life. We can also annihilate our own ego by suffering and degradation.[9]

By obedience to the necessity we find in the world, we do not lose our freedom but perfect ourselves since we are then marching to the sound of a distant Drummer. We are, then, doing God's will and not our own. Obedience to the divine will is salvific, no matter what else we do. Perfect obedience to the divine will makes us a unique presence of God on earth. Weil would call us to help others *in* Christ, not *for* Christ in such a fashion that our own ego becomes annihilated in the very act of helping.[10] And just as God "voids himself" of his divine nature by creating the world, so must we pour ourselves out, kenotically, the way God did by becoming incarnate, as St. Paul notes in Philipians2:7.

Weil knew full well that life on earth is not without grief and suffering. She speaks of this in terms of *Malheur* or "affliction." Affliction has four notes: physical suffering, inner distress and turmoil, the uprooting of one's life, and social degradation.[11] Physical suffering puts us in contact with necessity like nothing else. In fact, we cannot understand necessity without suffering. No one desires to experience affliction. We suffer it unwillingly. When affliction becomes extreme, we find ourselves nailed on the cross with Christ. Though subject to the law of necessity in the world, we have the option of making God our treasure or the one thing necessary. A person may be totally happy and joyful despite suffering under duress and affliction. In the teeth of suffering we must focus our attention on God. By cooperating with God's grace we're provided with wings to fly up to him.[12]

Allow me to say more about Weil's understanding of *decreation*. As far as I can tell, this is one of Weil's neologisms. As a good philosopher Weil makes fine distinctions. In this regard Weil distinguishes between "destruction" and "decreation." Weil sees "destruction" as a poor ersatz for decreation. Weil defines decreation as "to make something created pass into the uncreated."[13] Love on the supernatural level allows us to share in creating the world by self-abnegation and dying to ourselves. Just as Christ poured himself out by emptying himself of his divinity (*kenosis*), so must we completely empty ourselves of self-attachment. We do this by dealing with affliction, suffering, and death.[14]

[9] Ibid., p. 21.
[10] Ibid., p. 93.
[11] Springsted, pp. 42–43.
[12] Ibid., p. 83.
[13] *Gravity and Grace*, p. 78.
[14] Ibid., p. 80.

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Weil writes "May that which is low in us go downward so that which is high can go upward."[15] She gives us these cautionary words. We should not want the difficulties and hurdles we face in life to disappear completely. Rather, we need God's grace to transform them in order to test our resolve.[16] Affliction and suffering are the keys to the door of wisdom. In this connection we need to take our cues from Job who was willing to give up everything for the love of God. By descending to the abyss of nothingness we reach the "vegetative level" and God becomes for us life-giving bread.[17]

We are called to change our thinking,that is, reversing the objective and subjective spheres, as the *Upanishads* admonish us to do. We are born in sin and continue living sinful lives. We're called to reverse this pattern by dying to our own self. For Weil this involves *metanoia* or true conversion, making an about-face in our way of thinking, and more importantly, acting. Moreover, Weil feels that we must renounce the future. Instead we are called to live entirely in the present and be "such as we are."[18] She writes: "it is necessary to uproot oneself. To cut down the tree and make of it a cross, and then to carry it every day.[19]

In this connection it is important to understand Weil's notion of mediation. Mediation unites things that are different or disparate and for Weil mediation functions as a cosmic principle.[20] Weil believes that human beings mediate between God and that slice of creation given them from above. God simply loves that view of human beings that are visible from the unique perspective of each person. A person's "I' or ego acts as a filter or as a screen that must necessarily be removed so that God can view creation from the perspective of every person.[21]

By extinguishing one's ego, a person allows God to have contact with those whom fate or chance allows them to encounter on their life's journey. Hence one's withdrawal or self- annihilation or *fana,* as the Sufis call it, allows God and the Earth to form a pure, loving union. Weil hopes that the beauty of creation will be apparent to her eyes. By becoming ego-less, individuals allow all the beings that they meet, a direct contact with God. And conversely, a person thereby

[15] Ibid., p. 81.
[16] Ibid., p. 82.
[17] Ibid., p. 83.
[18] Ibid., p. 83.
[19] Ibid., p. 86. See Marian Maskulak, "Edith Stein and Simone Weil: Reflections for a Spirituality of the Cross, " *Theology Today* 64 (2008), 445–457 and Vance G. Morgan, *Weaving The World: Simone Weil On Science, Mathematics, And Love* (Notre Dame, IN: University of N.D. Press, 2005), pp. 159–171.
[20] Ann Pirruccello, "Gravity in the Thought of Simone Weil," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57 (2009), p. 73.
[21] *Gravity and Grace*, p. 88.

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stays in communion with God in all that they see, hear, feel, breathe, and touch.[22]

II. Weil's Relationship to Catholicism

Simone Weil was raised by her parents in an agnostic home in 1909. However, she always seemed to have a Christian outlook, inspired by her generous and altruistic love of others, although Weil did not formally become a Christian. Weil felt herself born within Christianity and completely renounced her Jewish heritage. For that reason she felt that she never really needed to become a Christian explicitly, and join the Roman Catholic Church.[23] On the other hand, it seems strange that Weil did not actually join the Roman Catholic Church and allow herself to be officially baptized. After all, as she recounts in *Waiting on God,* she had three contacts with Roman Catholicism that were life-changing. First, while Weil visited Portugal in 1935, she observed a procession by the wives of the local fishermen. These women carried candles and sang ancient hymns that were extremely sad and heart-rending. It dawned on her that Christianity functioned as the religion of slaves who cannot help belonging to the Church. And, to boot, Weil considered herself like the women in the procession. Why did Weil see Christianity as the religion of slaves? It may be that Weil saw herself as a slave to necessity, that is, the divine plan for the functioning of the universe. Weil felt that she had to live her life *totally* according to the divine will in order to be pleasing to God. That's why she insisted on complete and utter obedience or *hypermone.* Where did Weil derive her idea of conformity to the divine will? She came across this notion in Marcus Aurelius and the Stoics who spoke of *amor fati* (the love of fate) or the duty of conformity to the divine will as the uppermost duty in life.[24]

Second, Weil visited the 12th century Romanesque chapel in Assisi, Italy of St. Mary of the Angels in 1937. She spent two days there in a chapel where St. Francis often prayed. She could not resist a power that compelled her to get down on her knees. In this context one thinks of Thomas Aquinas who speaks of efficacious grace in the sense that God sometimes sends grace to individuals that so overpowers them that it overrides their own free will. Third, Weil relates how in 1938 she visited the Benedictine monastery of Solesmes in Sarthe, France. This abbey had become well-known for its wonderful performances of Gregorian chant by the monks stationed there over the years. Although at the time she had a terrible migraine headache,

[22] Ibid., p. 88.
[23] *Waiting on God*, p. 32.
[24] Ibid., p. 32.

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she found complete joy listening to the chanting by the monks. This incident gave Weil the realization of loving God despite her suffering at the time.

This particular experience demonstrated to Weil that one could love God despite the affliction (*le malheur)* one had at the moment. Weil learned another lesson from that episode. The thought of Christ's passion entered her mind and would remain with her throughout her life.[25] Weil noticed a young man in the chapel of Solesmes who appeared to be radiant after receiving Holy Communion. Weil saw this person as a providential messenger for two reasons: first, this experience convinced her of God's existence and, second, this young man made her aware of the seventeenth century metaphysical poets. In particular, later in life Weil had the good fortune of reading George Herbert's poetry, in particular his poem called "Love," which she committed to memory. It seems that these three experiences touched the very core of Weil's being existentially . She was so blown away by this intimate experience of God's presence that her intellectual scruples about God's existence melted away like wax in a roaring furnace.

During violent headaches Weil's concentration on the words of this poem, "Love," functioned as a prayer. Christ took possession of Weil during one of the recitations of this prayer/poem. For Weil this amounted to a sea-change in her thinking since she never thought it possible for a human to be in touch with God. Weil describes this by saying, "I only felt in the midst of my suffering the presence of a love, like that which one can read in the smile on a beloved face."[26]

It seems to me that Weil had a mystical experience at Solesmes, although prior to this time she had never read any mystical writings. Weil never felt a desire to read the mystics because their writings turned her off, just as reading the miracles in the Gospels or in the *Fioretti* (the Little Flowers of St. Francis) seemed unreal or incredulous to her. Weil felt strongly that "one can never wrestle enough with God if one does so out of pure regard for the truth."[27] Weil's passion for the truth reminds me of St. Augustine who understood his entire life as a search for the truth, or of John Henry Newman who took as his motto, "*Magna est veritas et praevalebit,"* and as his epitaph the words, "*Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem"*[28]

In this experience at Solesmes, Weil felt touched by the hand of God but her intellect had difficulty accepting it. Weil notes that

[25] Ibid., p. 34.
[26] Ibid., p. 36.
[27] Ibid., p. 36.
[28] Richard Penaskovic, "Saint Augustine' Confessions and Newman's Apologia: Similarities and Differences," *Augustinian Studies* 9 (1978), pp. 81–91.

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Christ would have us prefer the truth to him. Why so? She writes that Christ is identical with the truth before he is Christ. If one passionately seeks the truth, one will ultimately find Christ.[29] After this incredible experience Weil looked upon Plato, Homer, Dionysus, and Osiris in a real sense as Christ himself. In reading the Hindu scripture known as the *Bhagavad Gita* in 1940, Weil looked upon this book as having a Christian sound to it. She felt strongly that the *Gita* contained religious truth.[30] She felt that no religion, not even Christianity, had a monopoly on religious truth. This was one reason why she did not want to be baptized in the Catholic Church since the Church at that time believed strongly in the axiom derived from St. Cyprian, "Outside the Church no salvation," understood in an exclusive sense.

Weil also felt that God did not want her to be officially baptized in the Catholic Church. Hence she had to follow the truth as she perceived it and remain on the edge of the Church, thus giving hope to non-believers. She had to wait on God in patience, until God gave her the signal to be baptized. However, she did allow an unordained person to baptize her before her death.

At this time Weil refused to pray. Why not? She did not want to be seduced by the power of autosuggestion. Throughout the earlier part of her life Weil, wanted her emotions and intentions to be pure and unadulterated. About this she was almost scrupulous. For this reason Weil feared the power of suggestion implicit in her friendship with her spiritual director, Father Perrin. After learning the "Our Father" in Greek during the later period of her life, Weil memorized the "infinite sweetness" of these Greek words and recited them repeatedly for several days. She then got into the habit of praying the Our Father in Greek every day before work. Sometimes the recitation of the first few words of this prayer "tear my thoughts from my body and transport it to a place outside space. . . ."[31] Weil then found herself in a place of silence and at times felt the presence of Christ within her.

All three of the aforementioned experiences amounted to a sea-change in Weil's thought and are a large part of her conversion experience. Although Weil had mystical experiences in Assisi and at Solesmes, she still had her work cut out for her. Weil's life was not any less easy because of these experiences, because her powerful intellect had to come to grips with her mystical experiences. There was, in a sense, a tug of war between her heart and her intellect, which consumed her for the rest of her life.

[29] *Waiting on God*, p. 36.
[30] Ibid., p. 36.
[31] Ibid., p. 38.

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Weil could only write this to Father Perrin because he was very close to her. Weil notes that Father Perrin was like a brother and a father to her and she felt that she would die soon. This matter was not about Weil but about God who uses frail humans as instruments to achieve His divine purposes. Weil felt that God alone was her spiritual guide and director not Father Perrin, although she owed him "the greatest debt of gratitude that I could ever have incurred towards any human being."[32]

Father Perrin made Weil face the question of baptism that brought into focus for her the questions of dogma and faith. His charity, gentleness, and concern for Weil gained her friendship. Weil maintained that friendship with the friends of God focuses one's sight on God himself. Weil believed that the patience Father Perrin showed her came from a supernatural force, that is, from God's grace.[33] Weil refused to be baptized and to join the Church because she never felt called by God to do so. In fact, she was certain about this and never doubted that she was doing what God wanted her to do, i.e., remain outside the Church. The only time she would re-consider this decision was at the moment of her death, if God gave the order to do so. Weil writes "I should joyfully obey the order to go to the very centre of hell and to remain there eternally."[34] I don't believe many people could say these words.

Weil could be very critical of Christianity. Christianity should embrace all things since this religion claimed to be catholic or universal. However, Christianity failed in this regard. There were too many things outside the pale of Christianity such as the heretical traditions of the Albigensians and the Manicheans, those countries where blacks live, all of secular life, including those things that happened as a result of the Renaissance, such as the focus on the Greek and Latin classics. (41). For her Christianity is catholic by right but not by fact. Analogously, Weil felt that she could be a member of the Church by right but not by fact.[35] (41).

Weil felt it was her duty to show the world a "truly incarnated Christianity." However, to do so Christianity must be "catholic," that is, willing to embrace other religions, other cultures, and other people. Everything that is true but not falsehood. Ever since her birth Weil had stood on the point separating Christianity from everything that it is not. Her God-given duty consisted in remaining quite still (in patience or *en hypermone*), on the threshold of the Church without joining it. It did not worry Weil to remain suspended on this point. She did so without worry but also with sadness because of her many

[32] Ibid., p. 39.
[33] Ibid., p. 40.
[34] Ibid., p. 41.
[35] Ibid., p. 41.

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sins and transgressions.[36] For these reasons Weil did not join the Church and feared that Father Perrin might not understand how a person's very vocation could keep them from becoming a member of the Church.

Weil regards the use of the words, *anathema sit*, as an insurmountable *obex* or difficulty preventing her from joining the Catholic Church. In other words it would amount to a *sacrificium intellectus* for her to embrace Roman Catholicism because of the way the Church has used the words, *anathema sit*, down through the ages. For Weil the human intellect has the rightful duty to be free as a bird and to deny everything unacceptable to it from a rational standpoint.

Weil observes that although agnostics and atheists may question or deny the existence of God, they should not on that account be deprived of the sacraments. They in no way sin since they are simply following the truth the way they see it.[37] In this connection Weil distinguishes between two different kinds of languages: that of the individual and that of the social or collective body. God may speak individually to someone like Meister Eckhart, using words of love that may go against church dogma. However, this kind of language may not be appropriate to the Church collectively, that is, in the public sphere or domain. Weil feels comfortable saying this without denying the fact that that the Church acts as the guardian of doctrine and has in that capacity a legitimate right to deprive individuals of the sacraments.[38]

However, on the other hand, the Church abuses her power when she forces individuals to mimic her language. In this context Weil had difficulty accepting the notion of the Church as the "mystical body of Christ." It must be remembered that Weil wrote this statement before Pope Pius XII spoke of the Church as "the mystical body of Christ," in his encyclical, *Mystici Corporis* in the 1940s. Weil notes that other secular bodies or institutions may be spoken of in terms of mystical bodies.

As long as Weil followed her conscience in remaining outside the church, she cannot be faulted. As Weil notes, "I think it is as well that a few sheep should remain outside the fold in order to bear witness that the love of God is essentially something different."[39] Weil reminds us that that church needs to be conscious of the axiom, *ecclesia semper reformanda,* viz., that the Church must always need to be reformed or changed if she is to effect change on the societal level. Why so? History demonstrates that the Church had gone off

[36] Ibid., p. 43.
[37] Ibid., p. 44.
[38] Ibid., p. 46.
[39] Ibid., p. 47.

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the deep end during the time of the Inquisition, when she tortured those in Spain who refused to submit to her power.[40] (47).

The Church, says Weil, established a form of totalitarianism in the 13th century, reminiscent of the Roman Empire after the fifth century, when it was totalitarian and demanded uncritical and absolute obedience from its faithful. In the thirteenth century the Church acted in totalitarian fashion against the Albigensian heresy when it misused the words, *anathema sit*. The Church, says Weil, modeled totalitarian behavior for the twentieth century as seen in the rise of both communism and Nazism.[41] These were all reasons that made Weil reluctant to officially join the Church.

III. Some Reflections

1. There are several difficulties involved in understanding Weil's thought. For example, many of her works were published posthumously and have not been translated into English. Some of her later works such as *Venise Sauvée* written in 1940 and Weil's political and social work, *L'Enracinement* were never finished. Weil only edited a few of her works for publication. And there are two main groups who published her writings posthumously: the philosopher, Gustav Thibon and her spiritual advisor, Father Perrin on the one hand, and Albert Camus and the Weil family on the other. Thibon published the work *La Pesanteur et la Grace* (Gravity and Grace) which contains part of Weil's diaries thematically without paying attention to the chronology of Weil's thought. In the publication of the book, *Connaissance Surnaturelle,* the pagination does not take into account how Weil herself numbered the pages, and hence needs to be revised.[42]
2. Should Weil be faulted for her refusal of baptism and for not joining the Roman Church? I would argue that those writers who have accused her of a latent Gnosticism are wide of the mark, at least from a theological perspective. I am thinking of such interpreters as Charles Moeller, John M. Oesterreicher, M. More, Gustav Thibon, Dietrich von Hildebrand, and Father Perrin.[43] Catholic moral theology says that a person must always follow her conscience. If one follows the light as one sees it, one acts in accordance with the divine will. Simone Weil was

[40] Ibid., p. 47.
[41] Ibid., p. 48.
[42] Beyer, *Sinn und Genese*, p. 17.
[43] Ibid., p. 19.

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scrupulous in always acting in accordance with God's plan as she saw it. Moreover, who are we to judge? We do not have a mirror into someone else's heart and must presume that someone as conscientious as Simone Weil would never act in such a way as to displease God. Commentators, such as Dietrich von Hildebrand, John Oesterreicher and other Catholic authors who were living at a time when the axiom "Outside the church no salvation" was operative, were unaware of the meaning of religious pluralism as understood today. In the 1940s and 1950s, (and even today) the exclusivist paradigm or model dominated Catholic thought. The exclusivist model states briefly that my religion is correct, all others are false. Today theologians are much more open to the possibility of salvation outside the Church and see the various world religions as valid ways to salvation. Weil was prescient in seeing the world religions in a positive light and having insight into the Church as a church of saints and sinners.

Moreover, consider these facts. About 19% of the population of the world in 1491 was Christian, and roughly 79% of the world's population never heard of Christianity. In 1991 circa 33% of the population of the world called themselves Christian, whereas 44% heard about Christianity, and 23% were totally unaware of Christianity.[44] Are not, then, the world religions the ordinary way to salvation in God's plan? Many theologians today argue that the Church has neither a corner on the truth, nor a monopoly on holiness.

3. I am not convinced that Weil understood the true meaning of the Church as the mystical body of Christ. For Weil other institutions may be spoken of as "mystical bodies." Yet when theologians speak of the Church as "the mystical body of Christ" they are making the point that the Church, unlike secular institutions, has a divine and supernatural element to it, viz., it is led by the Holy Spirit and is suffused with divine grace. In this connection I agree with the German theologian, Heribert Muehlen who uses this formula to understand the Church. The Church is one Person, namely, the Holy Spirit, present in billions of human person simultaneously. How this occurs is the mystery of grace or the mystery of the Holy Spirit.[45]

[44] Gavin D'Costa, " Theology of Religions," in David F. Ford, ed., *The Modern Theologians :An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 626–644.

[45] Heribert Muhlen, *Una Mystica Persona: Die Kirche als das Mysterium der Identitat des Heiligen Geiste in Christus und den Christen (Wuerzburg: Ferdinand Schoningh, 1968).*

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4. Should the Catholic Church canonize Simone Weil as a saint? This raises thorny, theological questions. First, Weil emphasizes the cross of Christ and unfortunately says very little about the Resurrection other than stating that God's saving power would have been complete without the resurrection of Christ. Moreover, Weil does not see the Incarnation as a unique historical event nor does she look upon it as a revelation of the divine love. Weil found Christ in Egyptian religion, in Hindu texts like the *Upanishads,* in Buddhism, and in the ancient Greeks. For this reason some of Weil's interpreters wonder whether she should be called a Christian at all. Weil herself would not find it appropriate for the Church to canonize her for two reasons: (1) she would regard it as pride or *hybris* on the part of the Church to canonize or to condemn others and (2) because Weil saw herself as a sinner she would certainly not want others to venerate her.

On the other hand, I would say that Weil should be canonized by the Church for these reasons: First, she lived a very ascetical life and endured a great deal of "affliction" or suffering, including social rejection, since she was extremely hard on herself in her desire to become absolutely ego-less. Second, she had several mystical experiences as noted in her book, *Waiting on God.* Third, she submitted her will entirely to the demands of "necessity," accepting pain and suffering willingly in order to align herself closely with the cross of Christ. Fourth, she can serve as a role model for young women today who are experiencing physical, mental, and emotional pain. Fifth, in formally canonizing Weil, the Catholic Church will demonstrate her wholehearted acceptance of those who do not fit the mould and live their lives marching to the beat of a different tune, such as the Dalai Lama and Mahatma Gandhi.

Conclusion

Simone Weil did not have a conversion along the lines of St. Paul who went from persecuting Christians as a faithful Jew to joining them and becoming the Apostle of the Gentiles. Nor was her conversion like that of John Henry Cardinal Newman who went from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism in 1845. In a sense Simone Weil had a "non-conversion conversion." Although a Christian in her heart, she had three life-changing experiences that convinced her of the existence of God and God's love for humanity. Weil then felt called to completely renounce her own ego and to have the center of her existence outside herself in God. Her conversion was one from highly unorthodox Christian to a full-blown mystic, thanks to

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God's grace and Weil's steeled submission to waiting in God patiently for the right *kairos* before making any major decision in her life.

Richard John Penaskovic
Auburn University, Philosophy
6080 Haley Center
Auburn
United States
36849-5210

Email: penasri@auburn.edu

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