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## **Simone Weil on the Church: The Impersonal, Decreation, and the Absent God**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is on the two sides of Simone Weil's view of the Church: a totalitarian institution yet one that embraces the people. Thus, the attempt to reconcile these seemingly conflicting through a more nuanced reading of Weil's position. To do this, I use her notions of the impersonal, the process of decreation, and the Absent God. These three concepts will reveal that the Church is a societal institution that tends to become totalitarian if it fights to preserve the prestige of its social status. Using Weil's analysis, there is, then, a need to decreate and uncover that which is impersonal in the Church, imitating Christ on the cross—the culmination of God's impersonality and absence. There is no contradiction, then, in Weil's insights into the Christian Church, but in fact the essential reminder that a Christian should not be too attached to the world.

**Keywords:** *Catholic Church, totalitarian, impersonal, decreation, absent God*

## Christianity and the Catholic Church

It is vital to establish a short historical account of Christianity. It is also indispensable to establish the Christian environment in which Weil was familiar of for us to understand the context of her criticism.

Linda Woodhead argues that the two most important historical manifestation of Christianity are Church Christianity and Biblical Christianity.<sup>1</sup> Church Christianity refers to a group of believers who forms a “church,” which means a community of Christians as well as a building in which they gather. The Roman Catholic Church is the most prominent of this type of Christianity; the Eastern Orthodox Church and some Protestant churches such as Lutheran, Anglican and Presbyterian are included. Church Christianity focuses on church buildings, hierarchy, traditions, doctrines, and sacraments.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Biblical Christianity emerged after the Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Bible, not churches, priests, or bishops, nor traditions, doctrines, or sacraments, is emphasized as the supreme authority.

Dana Robert argues that the first three hundred years of Christianity was to establish the foundations of what would be a world religion. And its establishment and expansion start with its founder, Jesus Christ. Born Jewish, believed to be the only son of God the Father, started his ministry which attracted many, and after his resurrection sent his followers to all nations to announce the good news he proclaimed.<sup>3</sup>

The first followers of Christ called themselves “The Way.” They moved from city to city using Roman roads, and organized communities known as *ekklesia* which means church. The institutional church was established to organize the vast network of Christian believers scattered around the world, as

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Woodhead, *Christianity: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 46-48.

<sup>3</sup> Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 9-10.

well as prepare them to promote the good news of Christ.<sup>4</sup> Robert says that it is evident in the early Christians the spirit of mission, which was essential in evangelizing people of all nations.

Local church leaders known as bishops played a major role in the expansion of the network of Christian believers. Their task is to do “social services, collected money for the poor, solved theological disputes, and were the first to be tortured and executed during waves of persecution.”<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, wealthy members of the church sponsored gatherings, especially meeting places, which needs to be secret, since the Romans and Jewish authorities persecutes those who believed in Jesus Christ.

Christianity experienced persecutions in its early years. The Romans persecuted the Christians because of their refusal to worship pagan gods. Many were burned as streetlights, fed to lions for entertainment, and beheaded. However, as Tertullian said: “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church,” adherents to the Christian faith increased even with such persecutions.<sup>6</sup>

The most significant achievement of Christianity in the fourth century was when it was legalized in the Roman Empire through Emperor Constantine’s Edict of Milan in 313, which calls for the religious toleration of Christianity in the Roman empire. In short, Christianity was no longer persecuted, and even became the official religion of the Roman Empire in 319. Being the official religion of the empire creates a bond between church and state that made popes and kings be inclined to use oppression against those who refuse to accept the Catholic faith,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 16. Joseph Fernandes argues that the phrase associated with Tertullian was only a paraphrase. See Joseph Fernandes “*The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church*’. *Evaluate the place of martyrdom in the growth of early Christianity*, Academia. Accessed September 23, 2021. [https://www.academia.edu/8501398/ The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church Evaluate the place of martyrdom in the growth of early Christianity?](https://www.academia.edu/8501398/The_blood_of_the_martyrs_is_the_seed_of_the_Church_Evaluate_the_place_of_martyrdom_in_the_growth_of_early_Christianity?)

in the name of mission. Roberts explicitly notes this especially in the medieval period:

In the medieval unity of church and state, coercion became intertwined with mission in both theory and practice. The spiritual devotion of the early Crusaders was undeniable, and they made huge financial sacrifices. But their medieval version of Christianity confused evangelization with violent conquest and the slaughter of people unlike themselves.<sup>7</sup>

F. Ellen Weaver says that the Catholic environment which Weil was aware of was a Church in the period of pre-ecumenism, pre-biblical renewal, and pre-patristic renewal. The Church was still doctrinal and dogmatic, and still apologetic of anything outside the Church. Jansenism also reigned all over France, a theological movement that emphasized strict and legalistic morality, which led to legitimizing the *anathema sit*, the formula of condemnation.<sup>8</sup> Otherwise, Weil was attracted to Catholicism with its deep, intellectual but have problems with the absolutist exposition of the faith through St. Thomas Aquinas; its liturgy dominated by romantic, neo-gothic, and monastic influence; and its Gregorian chants.

### **Totalitarian or Religion of Slaves**

In *Gravity and Grace*, Weil writes:

Christendom has become totalitarian, conquering, and exterminating, because it has not developed the idea of God's absence and non-activity here below. It has attached itself to Jehovah no less than to Christ, and conceived of Providence in the manner of the Old Testament. Only Israel could stand up to Rome, because it resembled it; and this is how the birth of

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 324.

Christianity was marked with the Roman stain before it became the official religion of the Empire. The evil done by Rome has never been truly redressed.<sup>9</sup>

Here Weil argues that Christianity was not able to develop the idea of an absent God because of its ties with two nations, Israel and Rome. Israel influenced Christianity with its belief that God has power over things and can force people to do things which one's conscience cannot otherwise accept. On the other hand, Rome made Christianity its official religion, and with that came forth evil of insurmountable amount. The religious wars, the Crusades, and the Inquisition all manifested Rome and Israel's influence, that is why Weil says Christianity has transformed into a totalitarian, conquering, and exterminating institution.<sup>10</sup>

Analyzing Weil, John Hellman argues that Weil saw in Christianity a contradiction between the Old Testament and New Testament, because it is hard to reconcile the "cruelty of the Old and the gentleness of the New."<sup>11</sup> She believes that the Old Testament presents a God madly controlling the world and His believers, while in the New Testament Jesus encourages his followers to become like sheep.

To Hellman the Hebrews were warlike; they persecuted their neighbors who did not share their belief in their God and nationhood.<sup>12</sup> Weil contends that it is ironic for these people to incite violence towards those who they saw as idolatrous, when they themselves are idolatrous. Them being the "chosen people," is, for Hellman, their idolatry. It is not something carved from wood or

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<sup>9</sup> Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (New York: Routledge, 2002), 159.

<sup>10</sup> Weil refers Israel and Rome as Great Beasts: "Rome is the Great Beast of atheism and materialism, adoring nothing but itself. Israel is the Great Beast of religion. Neither the one nor the other is likable. The Great Beast is always repulsive." *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>11</sup> John Hellman, *Simone Weil: An Introduction to Her Thought* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982), 50.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

metal, but a group of people, a race, or a nation. With it they condemn their neighbors according to this idea. This pattern of idolatry and violence to unbelievers of this all-powerful God, Weil contends, was inherited by the Catholic Church, brought to fruition in the Medieval Times.

Moreover, Hellman argues that the other influence of Christianity's totalitarian tendency was the Roman Empire. Weil hated it for corrupting Christianity and of destroying the cultures of the past.<sup>13</sup> It is their imperialistic expansionistic ideology that the Romans have bequeathed to the Church, as has been made concrete in the Crusades, in the missionary conquests, and in the Inquisition. The belligerent atheism and materialism of the Romans has also damaged the spiritual environment that brought forth Christianity.<sup>14</sup> The patriotic ideology of the Romans also lead them to be idolatrous, wherein their aim was only to amuse themselves. Weil's critique of the Church lies not in its being the Church established by Christ, but in the brutality embedded in its foundations influenced by the Romans.

Also, Hellman says that the Romans were able to implant in Christianity a sense of time, of the historical process, and of God's relationship with man, which for him is absolutely incorrect.<sup>15</sup> First, the Christian Doctrine of Redemption was distorted by the Romans with their sense of time, that they understood redemption as a "temporal operation" rather than an eternal one. Second, man's relationship with God moves back to that of master slave one of the Jews. Weil argues that the Romanized God is seen "as a counterpart of the Emperor."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 51-53.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>16</sup> Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties towards Mankind*, trans. Arthur Wills (New York: Routledge, 2002), 271. Cf. Hellman, *Simone Weil: An Introduction to Her Thought*, 61.

Hellman asks, “but how could the Christians cooperate with such an anomalous usurpation?” And he answers that they succumbed to the Romans, as if they have no choice. Why? Weil gives her answer:

The Christians consented when they were too worn out being massacred, too disheartened at not seeing the arrival of the triumphant end of the world. It is thus that the Father of Christ, accommodated to the Roman fashion, became a master and owner of slaves. Jehovah furnished the necessary means of transition. There was no longer the least difficulty about welcoming him. There was no longer any dispute over property between the Roman emperor and him, since the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>17</sup>

In yielding ties with Rome, Christianity becomes what the Stones say, “the larger the collective, the more power and authority it harnesses.”<sup>18</sup> In the history of Christianity, we can see how the Church exercises its power over its members and non-members alike by means of using the words “*anathema sit*.” *Anathema sit* is the phrase used by the Church condemning a doctrine, a belief, or a person that is so heretical and contradictory to the revealed truth proclaimed by the Church.<sup>19</sup>

Weil says that the two words above are the reason why she does not want to be baptized, since those words are verdict to the minds which are other than the Church’s, hers is one of them.<sup>20</sup> The Stones argue that “The logic of excommunication, Weil contended, contradicts Jesus radical wisdom to love

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 277. Cf. Hellman, *Simone Weil: An Introduction to Her Thought*, 63.

<sup>18</sup> A. Rebecca Rozelle-Stone and Lucian Stone, *Simone Weil and Theology* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 23

<sup>19</sup> P. De Letter, “Anathema,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 390.

<sup>20</sup> Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Crauford (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1951), 77.

one's neighbors and enemies alike."<sup>21</sup> The Church, as a social structure, in a way removes or separates itself from Christ's teachings, even if it claims that its actions are mandates of God.

Weil recognizes the role of the Church as the guardian of Christian doctrine and the sacraments. But McCullough argues that her authority "has a rightful claim to *attention* only, not adherence."<sup>22</sup> Dogmas tend to shut the individual to think independently and freely contemplate on the mysteries the Church possesses. Subjecting its believers to a belief they cannot contest nor question, constitutes a totalitarian tendency.<sup>23</sup> That is why the Church condemns a person or a belief because it is antithetical to her belief. This means that dogmatic pronouncements are hegemonic proclamations; if a belief is not aligned to them, it should be excluded (and dogmas are the basis of this exclusion). McCullough contends that Weil agrees that the Church has the authority of condemning an error, but it should not lead them to prohibit and curse people who erred.<sup>24</sup>

For this reason, Weil espouses intellectual honesty. She believes that it is her obligation and vocation to be different from others, to have ideas others may not like, and critique everything there is to critique.<sup>25</sup> This intellectual honesty requires a certain amount of freedom, wherein she will have the capability to

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<sup>21</sup> Rozelle-Stone and Stone, *Simone Weil and Theology*, 25.

<sup>22</sup> Lissa McCullough, *The Religious Philosophy of Simone Weil: An Introduction* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2014), chapter 1.

<sup>23</sup> The author argues that Weil's knowledge of dogma is that it is "a particular belief or a whole system of belief," a definition used by the Church. See M.E. Williams, "Dogma," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 810-811. What is condemnable to her is the idea that the Church as a collective condemns the heathen, using such dogmas. However, she recognizes the vital obligation of the Church to be the safe keeper of these dogmas, and that it is their responsibility that those who attack them, who are Catholic, has to be punished. See Weil, *Waiting for God*, 80.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Weil says in her Notebook, "was it not possible to do this by prayer?" See Simone Weil, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil*, trans, Arthur Wills, vol. 1 (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1956), 228.

<sup>25</sup> Weil, *Waiting for God*, 85.



deny anything and protect herself from control.<sup>26</sup> She wants the faculty of knowledge and reason, to be vigilant of the workings of the collective, vis-à-vis the Church. McCullough argues that this freedom of intelligence is important and fundamental, because it will enable truth to be empirically known and verified.<sup>27</sup>

Praying, singing ancient hymns, procession, attracted Weil and talks about her being a slave, and the Church as the religion of slaves. It was her time in Portugal after a year of factory work:

In this state of mind then, and in a wretched condition physically, I entered the little Portuguese village, which, alas, was very wretched too, on the very day of the festival of its patron saint. I was alone. It was the evening and there was a full moon over the sea. The wives of the fishermen were, in procession, making a tour of all the ships, carrying candles and singing what must certainly be very ancient hymns of a heart-rending sadness. Nothing can give any idea of it. I have never heard anything so poignant unless it were the song of the boatmen on the Volga. There the conviction was suddenly borne in upon me that Christianity is pre-eminently the religion of slaves, that slaves cannot help belonging to it, and I among others.<sup>28</sup>

Here, Weil declares her fascination with Christianity and its believers. She sees that these people are one with her in suffering. Henry Finch says in this experience that the event manifested in these women their supernatural dignity.<sup>29</sup> She appreciates the religious piety they have, not out of pompous attitude, but of pure devotion and love.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>27</sup> McCullough, *The Religious Philosophy of Simone Weil*, chapter 1.

<sup>28</sup> Weil, *Waiting for God*, 67.

<sup>29</sup> Henry Leroy Finch, *Simone Weil and the Intellect of Grace* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 2001), 121.

It was in Weil's year of factory work that she believes she received the mark of being a slave and likened it to "the branding of the red-hot iron the Romans put on the forehead of their most despised slaves."<sup>30</sup> She felt in the experience of work like being torn to pieces, given the fact that she was suffering from intermittent headaches. The Stones say:

The effects of the unbearable working conditions—which so many of the world's population have no choice but to endure—were exacerbated by the fact that Weil suffered from severe migraine headaches her entire life. Emotionally exhausted and in wretched physical condition, she said that the experience turned her into a "slave."<sup>31</sup>

Hellman argues that her awareness of being a slave was not revealed during her experience in Portugal but has always been her upbringing.<sup>32</sup> Simone Petrement tells that when Simone Weil's cousin was orphaned, she said to her brother Andre "We must do everything that she wants because she is an orphan."<sup>33</sup> Another example is when they adopted "godchildren," these were soldiers who lost their families. Both children would give food packages and clothes, even give their all their chocolate and sugar. These events tell us of Weil's proximity to those who are in need, thus making herself become one of them.

Andrea Nye says that for Weil there must be a revival of a non-credulous and non-institutional religion<sup>34</sup>. This means that the Church needs to abandon the influences she assimilated from the Jewish religion and the Roman Empire. Weil does not say that religion is no longer viable for the world and that it needs

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<sup>30</sup> Weil, *Waiting for God*, 67.

<sup>31</sup> Rozelle-Stone and Stone, *Simone Weil and Theology*, 33.

<sup>32</sup> Hellman, *Simone Weil: An Introduction to Her Thought*, 75.

<sup>33</sup> Simone Petrement, *Simone Weil: A Life*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Random House, Inc., 1976), 14.

<sup>34</sup> Andrea Nye, *Philosophia: The Thought of Rosa Luxemburg, Simone Weil, and Hannah Arendt* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 92.

to be demolished. She believes in the Catholic Church to be the religion of slaves, because the Church really holds some truth to the mysteries of God, and this is the reason why people cling to it. The problem, precisely, is that it has ceased to uphold its Catholicity; hence for Weil it needs to be firm in upholding its Catholic nature. She says:

Christianity should contain all vocations without exception since it is catholic. In consequence the Church should also. But in my eyes Christianity is catholic by right but not in fact. So many things are outside it, so many things that I love and do not want to give up, so many things that God loves, otherwise they would not be in existence. All the immense stretches of past centuries, except the last twenty are among them; all the countries inhabited by colored races; all secular life in the white peoples' countries; in the history of these countries, all the traditions banned as heretical, those of the Manicheans and Albigenses for instance; all those things resulting from the Renaissance, too often degraded but not quite without value.<sup>35</sup>

### **Uncovering the Impersonal and the Absent God: Decreation**

Weil argues that for man to separate himself from the collective is to transcend above the personal and cross the threshold of the impersonal.<sup>36</sup> She argues that to be a person is to have a personality, that is, a human being of social prestige. They are aggrandized with status, privilege, titles, etc. On the other hand, the collective is an aggregate of persons. If the persons are the receivers

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<sup>35</sup> Weil, *Waiting for God*, 75.

<sup>36</sup> Simone Weil, "Human Personality," in *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, ed. Sian Miles (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2005), 77. She describes the impersonal as an aspiration that good and not bad be done to every human being, that is what is sacred located at the bottom of our hearts. *Ibid.*, 71. This sanctity is what Weil expects to emerge in the Church, not a personality that is too drenched in social prestige and power.

of social prestige, the collective bestows it to them. The person is subjugated to this collective, and whatever the collective commands, the person follows.

The collective works by way of manipulating the individual egos of its members, thinking or believing that it is for the benefit of themselves.<sup>37</sup> The members pander to their desires, which is intensified by their sense of belongingness. That is why Weil says it acts as an ersatz divinity, or a substitute divinity, like the golden calf, fanatically worshipped by the Hebrews.<sup>38</sup> Hence, it happens that simultaneously with the people getting attracted to the Church as a refuge or an institution that consoles, these same people become slaves in their membership. This is because their reverence of the societal structure transforms the Church into an idolatry, a substitute divinity.

The Catholic Church as a collective body believes that it has access to the sacral realm. But Weil does not think so, because since the persons and the collective is embellished in social influence, sanctity is veiled. She argues that this hidden sanctity is the impersonal. The impersonal is that which has buried deep in one's heart the expectation that good and not evil be done to him.<sup>39</sup> It has been buried because of humanity's ascription to the collective such as the Church.

And the process towards entering the realm of the impersonal is this, "a collectivity must dissolve into separate persons before the impersonal can be reached,"<sup>40</sup> After the dissolution, persons need to dissolve themselves, and this process is called decreation. Ranilo Hermida argues that in decreation we relinquish our deceptive existence, upholds our connection with God, and enter towards the impersonal.<sup>41</sup> In this process we not only renounce our existence but a consent to be a non-existing being. He argues that in the event of denouncing

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 19-20. Weil calls the collective as the Great Beast, following Plato.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>41</sup> Ranilo B. Hermida, "Simone Weil: A Sense of God," in *Prajñā Vihāra* 4, no. 2 (July-December 2003), 97.

ourselves it is not an accomplishment or victory over something, but it is a revealing of our mortality, of our being creatures.<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, decreation is the process in response to God's act of creation. Weil contends that God's absence in this world is his abandonment of it. She says "the creation is an abandonment. In creating what is other than himself, God necessarily abandoned it."<sup>43</sup> This means the necessity of God's abandonment is the act of creation. Creation cannot be so, if God meddles with it. As Hermida puts it, "creation, in other words, is truly and totally a gratuitous act of the part of God. It is God wielding and then forsaking His power. It is an act of sacrifice on the part of God."<sup>44</sup> In other words, after God created the world, he let it be—abandonment.

The abandonment of God of his creation is an act taking a step back, a distance from it. God's absence in creation was a precondition of creation itself, meaning if without this absence creation cannot happen. There is a distance and yet a connection. Davison suggests "distance between God and the world allows the world to be, and distance between worldly things allows God to be present within the world."<sup>45</sup> In short, the absence of God in things, in this world, enables him to be present in them.

Also, Weil argues that absence is necessary for the world to be itself. If all will be God then there will be no world, especially human beings. However, this absence of God resulted into the world to become like God.<sup>46</sup> The world becomes so mundane that he relegated God into nothing but a myth or an invention of the mind. This is what is happening in the modern times to which

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>43</sup> Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebook*, trans. Richard Rees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 103 & Weil, *Gateway to God*, 48.

<sup>44</sup> Hermida, "Simone Weil: A Sense of God", 96-97.

<sup>45</sup> Andrew Davison, "The Mediating Possibilities of Absence in the Thought of Simone Weil," in *Theology* 112, no. 865 (January/February 2009), 4.

<sup>46</sup> Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 109.

De Kesel says as the age of the I.<sup>47</sup> It consists of a shift from God as the center of the world to the I as the center. God has been veiled by the ego. He contends that after many years of religious wars and the Inquisition made humanity realized that God is no longer that center of reality. No outside force can influence our actions and decisions, our fate and destiny.

De Kesel says “everything has become ‘objective’ except us, that is the ‘things’ thinking this. God too has become an ‘object’.”<sup>48</sup> Man stands higher in relation to beings other than him, including God. It is like saying all things revolve around him, and it is him who commands things to do such that. The ego becomes a God himself, and it manifests itself through its power to say ‘I’. But, De Kesel argues that the power to say “I” poses a great threat in man’s relationship with God because it will do whatever anything to satisfy its desires, even to the point of rejecting others, including God.<sup>49</sup> The Stones agree saying that since the ego expresses itself by satisfying only its desires and wants to be the center of the world, which in effect other beings are only means at his disposal.<sup>50</sup>

Likewise, the Stones argue that as the I or ego is a product of creation, the creation other than God, is subjected to mortality and death. And, because of this truth, it tries to resist using force and violence.<sup>51</sup> That, for it to be on top of the food chain, it needs to devour its enemies, even closest to it, with force. It excludes others or defend itself against those who tries to undermine or scrutinize it, but at the same time expands its power and influence.

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<sup>47</sup> Marc De Kesel, “The Power to Say I. Reflections on the Modernity of Simone Weil’s Mystical Thought,” in *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 5 (2019), 167.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 168. The proponent of this thought is Rene Descartes, with his discovery man’s ability to think, to doubt even his thinking and existence, posits man as the foundation of reality. As a result, everything is objectivized.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>50</sup> Rozelle-Stone and Stone, *Simone Weil and Theology*, 14.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 17.

## The Christian Outsider

Simone Weil, born Jew, but agnostic growing up, has a deep sense for Christianity's purification. Hellman says that this purification is eradicating the influences brought by the Jews and the Roman Empire into it, which fundamentally will be very hard. What is at stake here, for Weil, is the spiritual connection of the Christians with God. However, that which Weil wants to be purified is the longing and preservation of prestige, of being too attached to the world. The Jews and the Romans have the same attitude, to protect their own by massacring its neighbors, for land, power and influence. Weil sees that well on the outside, and this could be the reason why she declined being baptized, to see to it that the outsider's point of view be heard. We might become too complicit to the acts of the religion, and that we must keep a blind eye. But, for her, intellectual honesty, must be of priority.

Weil argues the fault done by Christianity is that it does not anymore have the divine.<sup>52</sup> Von der Ruhr argues that Christianity has no more sense of purity of thought and deed. Weil wants Christianity to be pure of character that is not influenced by selfish desires or opinion.<sup>53</sup> He contends that this contamination is due to secularism and humanism, and that it is by a certain kind of atheism, that instead of destabilizing our idea of God, as common atheists do, deepens our understanding of Him.<sup>54</sup> This atheism is not unbelief, but an inquiry towards a transcendental realization of the divine.

Moreover, Von der Ruhr argues that Weil's opposition to the Church is due to what she calls as 'Christianity by force,' especially in Africa and Asia.<sup>55</sup> Weil detests the Church uprooting traditions and cultures of evangelized places. Also, for Weil, God should not be the reason for man's expansionistic aspirations. He

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<sup>52</sup> Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 115.

<sup>53</sup> Mario Von der Ruhr, "Christianity and the Errors of Our Time: Simone Weil on Atheism and Idolatry," in *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 68 (2011), 208.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

should be not part of a reason for war, and it is unacceptable that the banners of war contain God's words. To commit an atrocity, such as the Inquisition, in the name of God leads to a contradiction, because the idolatry it wants to suppress is the same idolatry it wants to establish.<sup>56</sup>

The Church as a social institution make the sacraments idolatrous because the believers only participate in the sacraments for conformism, that when they are not participating is in some way against teaching, and not realizing that such acts are their means towards establishing a real connection with the divine.<sup>57</sup> Weil warns the Church and its believers the danger this kind of attitude does for them, that they may tend to misuse these signs and symbols only for their own pleasure. Weil has a great fascination and attraction to the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. She believes that the sacraments lead the believers to a personal contact with God. But she contends that the sacraments must not be institutionalized, that it is only exclusive for the Church's followers and practitioners.

Weil accuses Christianity as totalitarian because it has refused itself to be open to the idea that God is absent in this world.<sup>58</sup> A belief of such a God would bring about an authentic, pure, and honest relationship. She thinks that an institution such as the Church has to develop such idea, in order that the mysteries hidden in its sacraments be revealed, not in a reincarnated Christ, but of recognizing that instead of looking for this omnipresent God, we need to give our attention to those who suffer, the Christ who said "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me" (Mt. 25: 35-36).

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>57</sup> Rozelle-Stone and Stone, *Simone Weil and Theology*, 13-14.

<sup>58</sup> Susan Taubes says that God's absence is not because we are sinful human beings, Weil understands that the unworldliness of God's existence, his silence, and nothingness are his essential features. See Susan A. Taubes, "The Absent God," *The Journal of Religion* 35, 1 (January 1955), 6.



Weil describes her situation on the Church as “on the threshold.”<sup>59</sup> To be on this vantage point one will restlessly look for answers to questions that bother the mind, and to make rest prejudices that reign in the head. Perrin argues that Weil’s religious inquiries were profound, yet many faults are found in her insights especially on the Church.<sup>60</sup> Being on the outside of the Church Weil was able to look into the Church critically, even if Perrin says she was ignorant on many points, nonetheless valid and needs to be clarified.

## Conclusion

So, how does Weil’s critique of the Church tell us of her philosophy? At first thought we might say that her critique is biased since she refused baptism multiple times, and that she was born from a Jewish yet agnostic parents. We may think that a legitimate criticism needs to come from someone who is inside the Church. But is someone from the outside not allowed to speak against the Church? It is argued that, on the contrary, as an outsider, Weil legitimized her position on the Church. Being outside she was able to exercise her intellectual honesty which, for her, every person must have, especially Christians. And to be on the outside, she protects herself from the control of the collective.

Her philosophy seems to contain a lot of paradoxical claims, but these paradoxes define Weil’s philosophy. Her idea that the Church has become a totalitarian institution and that at the same time it is the religion of slaves, does not constitute a contradiction, although paradoxical. In her letter to Maurice Schumann, Weil says that she is paradoxically on the inside and outside the Church. On the inside in relation to the sacraments especially the Eucharist. And on the outside in relation to her vehemence to the Church as a social entity.<sup>61</sup> Weil’s critique actually reflects the Church’s God, one who has created the world,

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<sup>59</sup> Joseph-Marie Perrin, “The church, mystical and social,” in *Simone Weil as We Know Her*, trans. Emma Craufurd (London: Routledge, 2003), 41;141.

<sup>60</sup> Perrin even says that Weil was torn by this conflict of Christianity as totalitarian and religion of slaves. *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

and, in having created it, abandoned it, shedding off power and prestige in the name of those who are suffering and in need of refuge.

This paper recognizes the dynamism of the Church. If Simone Weil was alive when the Second Vatican Council was convened, she would put a smile in her face at the gate of heaven. Resistance to reforms would be condemnable to her eyes. The Church must look always for the signs of the times, of what needs to change in relation to what is happening in our world, particularly the poor and the oppressed. At the same time, understanding itself as a social institution, to not dwell in it, and to pursue what is heavenly and impersonal.

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