

# Christianity and the Errors of Our Time: Simone Weil on Atheism and Idolatry<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

In his 1985 book on philosophy and atheism, the Canadian thinker Kai Nielsen, a prolific writer on the subject, wonders why the philosophy of religion is ‘so boring’, and concludes that it must be ‘because the case for atheism is so strong that it is difficult to work up much enthusiasm for the topic.’<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Nielsen even regards most of the contemporary arguments for atheism as little more than ‘mopping up operations after the Enlightenment’<sup>3</sup> which, on the whole, add little to the socio-anthropological and socio-psychological accounts of religion provided by thinkers like Feuerbach, Marx and Freud, as any ‘reasonable person informed by modernity’ will readily acknowledge.<sup>4</sup> On this view, the answer to Kant’s question – ‘What may we hope?’ – does not gesture towards a resurrection and personal immortality, but instead to the death of religious discourse itself:

I think, and indeed hope, that God-talk, and religious discourse more generally, is, or at least should be, dying out in the West, or more generally in a world that has felt the force of a Weberian disenchantment of the world. This sense that religious convictions are no longer a live option is something which people who

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Mr John Kinsey, Dr Ieuan Lloyd, Prof. Anthony O’Hear, and the audience who attended a presentation of this paper on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2009 at the Royal Institute of Philosophy in London, for their generous and helpful comments. A slightly different draft of this paper has appeared in Lucian and Rebecca Stone (eds.), *The Relevance of the Radical: Simone Weil 100 Years Later* (Continuum: London, 2009). I am indebted to Continuum Publishers for permission to reprint it here.

<sup>2</sup> Kai Nielsen, *Philosophy and Atheism* (New York: Prometheus, 1985), 224.

<sup>3</sup> Nielsen, *Philosophy and Atheism*, 224.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 224–225.

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think of themselves as either modernists or post-modernists very often tend to have.<sup>5</sup>

A construal like this, which views religious belief as a phenomenon whose philosophical examination has been pretty much concluded, and which may therefore be handed over to the social scientist for general historiographic and anthropological archiving, certainly makes it hard to see what the philosopher of religion could have to contribute to the subject that, far from being 'boring', constituted a clarification of what is involved in the religious form of life, let alone one that could be recognized to *be* such, even by those who, unlike Nielsen, are religious believers.

However, the latter are likely to object that Nielsen's indictment of religious discourse is itself the product of problematic assumptions about the nature of religious belief, on the one hand, and the requirements of philosophical inquiry, on the other. The claim that the case for atheism is 'so strong' as to make religious convictions passé, for example, seems to imply, not only that both attitudes or forms of life are answerable to some Archimedean standard of intelligibility and rationality, but that the logical relation between religious belief and atheism must be roughly analogous to that between the affirmation of a proposition and its negation. Indeed, Nielsen thinks it obvious that, when religious believers affirm that there is a God, or that God created the world,

they ... believe that [these] are *factual* assertions: that is to say that they have truth-values. It is a *fact* that there is a God; it is a *fact* that he created the world; it is a *fact* that he protects me and the like.<sup>6</sup>

But since all factual claims must, on Nielsen's view, be subject to public verification or falsification, and 'if we cannot even say what *in principle* would count as *evidence* against the putative statement that God created the world, then "God created the world" is devoid of factual content.'<sup>7</sup> Thus, the believer's avowal purports to assert a fact when, ironically, it does not even have a truth-value.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Kai Nielsen, 'Can Anything be Beyond Human Understanding?' in Tim Tessin and Mario von der Ruhr (eds.), *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 179–180.

<sup>6</sup> Kai Nielsen and D. Z. Phillips, *Wittgensteinian Fideism?* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 31. (My emphasis).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

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If this analysis adequately characterizes religious utterances *en gros*, then it looks as if the believer is, indeed, guilty of a semantic sleight of hand, in which the very conditions of a meaningful assertion are suspended no sooner than they have been acknowledged, thus turning the believer into what Oscar Wilde would have described as ‘an adept in the art of concealing what is not worth finding’.<sup>9</sup>

That this conclusion would, however, be as hasty as Nielsen’s identification of the truth-valued with the factual, and as unwarranted as his assumptions about what believers *must* mean by assertions whose surface grammar resembles that of empirical propositions, has been forcefully argued by the late D. Z. Phillips, whose detailed response to Nielsen in *Wittgensteinian Fideism?*<sup>10</sup> owes much of its inspiration to the works of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Simone Weil, two thinkers who not only shared a deep religious sensibility, but who rightly sensed that positivist or emotivist analyses of that sensibility were just as crude as the charge that all atheists suffer from an idolatrous aberration of the intellect.

Nielsen’s own attitude towards Wittgenstein and Weil is guarded and sceptical. While he admits that Wittgenstein’s remarks on religion, for example, are ‘suggestive’, he still dismisses them as ‘too fragmentary and apocalyptic in tone to be much more than exasperating hints’,<sup>11</sup> and thus as not being of much use in the debate. On the contrary, he finds that a Wittgensteinian conception of religion ‘yields an utterly devastating view for Christianity’, because it turns religion into

a form of life that cannot be shown to have any superior rationality, authenticity, or justifiability to other incommensurable forms of life. But that is precisely what anyone who regards himself as a Christian, in any tolerably orthodox sense, cannot accept... With such Wittgensteinian friends, the Christian philosopher might remark, who needs enemies.<sup>12</sup>

Nielsen is, of course, right to caution the Christian thinker against false prophets in the philosophy of religion, but then a similar warning could be issued against those atheists whose condescending

<sup>9</sup> Oscar Wilde, ‘The Decay of Lying’, in *Complete Works* (London: Collins, 1983), 973.

<sup>10</sup> Nielsen and Phillips, *Wittgensteinian Fideism?* (London: SCM Press, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Kai Nielsen, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 45.

<sup>12</sup> Nielsen, *Philosophy and Atheism*, 223–224.

caricatures of religion undermine the very humanist cause they are ostensibly trying to defend. Moreover, the claim that ‘tolerably orthodox’ Christian philosophers should be able to demonstrate the ‘superior rationality’ of their religious convictions over alternative perspectives on life, seems to me neither warranted, nor defensible.

While it is true that, for such believers, *fides* and *ratio* form a symbiotic relationship in which the former can be inspired, helpfully expounded, and deepened by the latter – e.g. in natural and systematic theology – and while they may regard their faith as the deepest and most appropriate response to the existential questions that trouble them, they would surely not be so naïve as to think that they could rationally demonstrate the superiority of that response to atheists like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, or Kai Nielsen.

Indeed, it is precisely because such an undertaking would be as formidable as that of trying to persuade a miser to be generous, on the miser’s *own* terms, that Plato’s depiction of Socrates’ exchanges with the power-hungry orators in the *Gorgias*, for example, can emerge as a realistic and truthful account of what would be involved in the kind of persuasion that informed a radical reorientation of the spirit. In presenting us with a dialogue that does *not* culminate in an epiphanic ending for any of Socrates’ interlocutors, Plato is not so much revealing Socrates’ dialectic labours to be futile – in fact, as genuine expressions of concern for the spiritual welfare of his fellow citizens, they never are – as drawing attention to both the (psychological) obstacles that may get in the way of seeing things from Socrates’ perspective, and the limits of *rational justification*. Far from giving offence to orthodox Christians, these limits are clearly acknowledged in their emphasis on the need for revelation, and summarized in the dictum *credo ut intelligam*.

Now, whether a Wittgensteinian analysis of key Christian concepts might nevertheless cause just such offence, is an altogether different matter, which I will not pursue here, save to note the following: On the one hand, even the more orthodox Catholics among, for example, D. Z. Phillips’ commentators, agree that his account must not be understood as a unified theory of religious discourse, but represents a broad spectrum of philosophical positions and perspectives that range from the strictly orthodox to the ‘heretical’, and that this is also what one would expect of a philosopher who sees himself as a disinterested grammarian of *Lebensformen* (forms of life) and their distinctive, though by no means unrelated, conceptual and linguistic frameworks. Thus, as the Thomist scholar Brian Davies has pointed out in a recent, critical reappraisal of Phillips’ work, much of it can simply be read as a straightforward attack on

anthropomorphism, and his account of God-talk, in particular, as an unqualified endorsement of Aquinas' doctrine of divine simplicity – i.e. the view that God is not an object among objects, but unique, non-spatial, causally unaffected, changeless, etc. – according to which God's existence is *not* properly described as a 'fact' that might, for instance, lend itself to a *posteriori* investigation. If Phillips is theologically out of line here, then, as Brian Davies rightly insists, so is Thomas Aquinas,<sup>13</sup> whose place in the history of Biblical scholarship is hardly that of a non-traditionalist or revisionist. This is not to deny that there are features of Phillips' account of religion from which the orthodox believer would rightly withhold the *imprimatur*, including a construal of immortality according to which '[eternity] is not an extension of this present life, but a mode of judging it ... not *more* life, but this life seen under certain moral and religious modes of thought'.<sup>14</sup> But then, as has already been pointed out, Phillips' work was never intended as an exercise in religious apologetics to begin with, nor should he be criticized for diverging from official Church doctrine when alternative understandings of immortality, prayer, covenant, the idea of a chosen people, etc. seem to him deeper, both philosophically and spiritually.

Readers who have been struck by the close philosophical kinship between Wittgenstein and Simone Weil will not be surprised to learn that Nielsen views the latter with a mixture of admiration and incomprehension. On the one hand, he admits that he is impressed by the starkness of Weil's thought – on the subject of *hubris*, for example<sup>15</sup> – granting that it 'has insight' and acknowledging that it is 'sensitive to *some* of the conceptual perplexities' that also occupy his own thinking about religion. Indeed, Nielsen finds that his disagreements with her seem to arise from a shared universe of discourse:

Miss Weil is not, after all, to me like the Azande with his witchcraft substance. We both learned 'the language' of Christian belief; only I think it is illusion-producing while she thinks

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Brian Davies, 'Phillips on belief in God', *Philosophical Investigations* 30.1 (July 2007), 219–244, esp. 229–230.

<sup>14</sup> D. Z. Phillips, *Death and Immortality* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 49. For a critical assessment of Phillips' view, see Mario von der Ruhr, 'Theology, Philosophy, and Heresy: D. Z. Phillips and the Grammar of Religious Belief', in ed. Andy Sanders, *D. Z. Phillips' Contemplative Philosophy of Religion* (London: Ashgate, 2007), 55–75.

<sup>15</sup> Nielsen and Phillips, *Wittgensteinian Fideism?*, 197.

that certain crucial segments of it are our stammering way of talking about ultimate reality.<sup>16</sup>

Then again, Nielsen has to confess that ‘what she can understand and take as certain, I have no understanding of at all’, indeed that Weil ‘blithely accepts what I find unintelligible’, so that, apart from momentary flashes of agreement, ‘a very deep gulf separates us’.<sup>17</sup> In what follows, I will not engage with Nielsen’s assessment of Wittgenstein and Weil, but rather look at some of what Weil herself has to say about atheism and its relation to religious belief, not only for the sobriety her reflections bring to the polemic exchanges that have come to dominate much of the current debate about religion, but because of the impartiality with which she exposes the practitioners of idolatry on *either* side of the divide. In addition, her thought calls for the continuation of precisely the kind of dialogue that, in her own time (1934–1938) brought together such staunchly anticlerical movements as the ‘Popular Front’ and Christian thinkers like Yves Congar, Jacques Maritain, Jean Daniélou, and Henri de Lubac.<sup>18</sup>

## **2. Idolatrous Atheists and Idolatrous Christians**

In *Gravity and Grace*, a series of notebook entries compiled by her friend Gustave Thibon after her death, Simone Weil claims that ‘[the] errors of our time come from Christianity without the supernatural’,<sup>19</sup> and that the influences of secularism and humanism are the primary causes of this development. What she means by ‘supernatural’ in this context is not ‘metaphysical’, however, but rather a certain purity of character or motive, one that is uncontaminated by self-regarding desires or sentiments. Thus, Mother Teresa’s love of the poor and afflicted, for example, could be described as supernatural, whereas a love directed solely at what is pleasing, attractive, or lovable, would count as ‘natural’ love. As for the ‘errors of our time’, Weil’s catalogue includes blind faith in technological and

<sup>16</sup> Nielsen and Phillips, *Wittgensteinian Fideism?*, 31.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>18</sup> For an excellent discussion of this dialogue and its aftermath, see Stephen Bullivant, ‘From “Main Tendue” to Vatican II: The Catholic Engagement with Atheism 1936–1965’, in *New Blackfriars* **90.1026** (March, 2009): 178–188.

<sup>19</sup> Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, tr. Emma Craufurd and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 2002) (references indicated by *GG*), 115

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economic progress;<sup>20</sup> the prevalence of narrowly utilitarian conceptions of the good;<sup>21</sup> the idolization of religious, social or political bodies and institutions;<sup>22</sup> an uncritical deference to science as the only paradigm of true knowledge and understanding;<sup>23</sup> debased notions of compassion and gratitude;<sup>24</sup> a ‘mutilated, distorted, and soiled’ sense of beauty (e.g. in art, music, architecture, or literature);<sup>25</sup> the proliferation of pseudo-spiritualities;<sup>26</sup> a growing rift between secular life and religious practices;<sup>27</sup> the degradation of the sacraments to merely external rituals;<sup>28</sup> and an ever-growing scepticism about ‘man’s supernatural vocation’.<sup>29</sup> Now, even though Weil believes that secularism and humanism are the prime causes of these social ills, she also insists that a certain kind of atheism, far from undermining belief in God, may actually serve to deepen it.<sup>30</sup> If this is so, then the relation between religious faith and atheism is far more complex than the ready employment of terms like ‘believer’ and ‘atheist’ in ordinary discourse about religion might suggest, and merits further investigation.

What, then, does Weil have to say about the two kinds of atheism – the one which is directly antithetical to the Christian faith, and that which may contribute to its purification?

As she sees it, the former is typically materialist in orientation and idolatrous, taking as its object not only material goods,<sup>31</sup> but aspirations towards power, fame, and other variants of prestige, as well as

<sup>20</sup> GG, 162.

<sup>21</sup> Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*, tr. A. F. Wills (London: Routledge, 2002) (references indicated by NR), 539.

<sup>22</sup> Simone Weil, *Selected Essays*, ed. and tr. Richard Rees (London: Oxford University Press, 1962) (references indicated by SE), 53.

<sup>23</sup> NR, 237.

<sup>24</sup> Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, tr. Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) (references indicated by WG), 162–163.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> NR, 273.

<sup>27</sup> Simone Weil, *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks* (London: Routledge, 1988) (references indicated by IC), 151. See also, NR, 118.

<sup>28</sup> Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, ed. and tr. Richard Rees (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970) (references indicated by FLN), 295.

<sup>29</sup> SE, 47.

<sup>30</sup> ‘There are two atheisms of which one is a purification of the notion of God’ (GG, 114).

<sup>31</sup> Simone Weil, *Notebooks*, 2 vols., tr. Arthur Wills (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956) (references indicated by NB) vol. 1, 144.

the attainment of absolute goods (justice, equality, liberty, etc.) through revolutionary change wrought by a worldly power:

Atheistic materialism is necessarily revolutionary, for, if it is to be directed towards an absolute good here on earth, it has to place it in the future. In order that this impetus should have full effect there must therefore be a mediator between the perfection to come and the present. This mediator is the chief – Lenin, etc. He is infallible and perfectly pure. In passing through him evil becomes good.<sup>32</sup>

In Weil's *Notebooks*, the progress in whose name such revolutionaries are carrying out their sinister maneuvers is described as 'the outstanding atheistic idea', but of course she does not mean by this that faith in the betterment of the human condition is a vain hope and the relentless work for its realization a waste of time. Such an attitude would betray precisely the kind of un-Christian fatalism and quietism that Weil herself never tired of combatting, whether in her writings, in the classroom, or on the factory floor. The point of her remark is rather that the propagation of the 'progress' in question may be grounded in *hubris* and fuelled by idolization of an individual (Lenin, Hitler), a collective (the proletariat), or an abstract process (History). As Weil puts it:

Even materialists place somewhere outside themselves a good which far surpasses them, which helps them from outside, and towards which their thought turns in a movement of desire and prayer. For Napoleon it was his star. For Marxists it is History. But they place it in this world, like the giants of folklore who place their heart (or their life) inside an egg inside a fish in a lake guarded by a dragon; and who die in the end. And although their prayers are often granted, one fears they must be regarded as prayers addressed to the devil.<sup>33</sup>

In this connection, Weil is also struck by the frequent combination of such unholy self-transcendence with an overly zealous reverence for science, or *scientism*. Her examples of this alliance include the French atheist Félix Le Dantec (1869–1917), and a well-known gang of anarchist terrorists:

In France, people question everything, respect nothing; some show a contempt for religion, others for patriotism, the State, the administration of justice, property, art, in fact everything under the sun; but their contempt stops short of science. The

<sup>32</sup> *GG*, 173–174.

<sup>33</sup> *FLN*, 308.



crudest scientism has no more fervent adepts than the anarchists. Le Dantec is their saint. Bonnot's *bandits tragiques* took their inspiration from him, and the greatest hero among them, in the eyes of his comrades, was nicknamed 'Raymond la Science.'<sup>34</sup>

Weil is by no means opposed to scientific or technological progress *per se*, which would be an absurd position to take, nor does she reject automation if this would bring genuine relief to the worker. Her concern is rather with the crudely positivist gospel of writers like Le Dantec, whose ready dismissal of religious belief in *Athéisme* (1907) ends up doing just as great a disservice to the cause of science as it does to atheism.<sup>35</sup>

At this point, it would be tempting to conclude that the religious believer exemplifies the exact opposite of the atheist as here described, but Weil, ever suspicious of deceptively simple dichotomies, instead proceeds to show that the expression 'religious believer' is no less problematic and obscure than the label 'atheist', indeed that the latter provides a mirror in which the former can see the reflection of her own spiritual deformities. For while it is true that '[e]very atheist is an idolater – unless he is worshipping the true God in his impersonal aspect', there is (as yet) no reason for the believer to congratulate herself on her own moral and spiritual rectitude, because, as Weil insists in the *First and Last Notebooks*, '[t]he majority of the pious are idolaters'.<sup>36</sup> Her verdict is grounded, not only in personal encounters with fellow Christians, including priests and other leading representatives of institutionalised religion – e.g. she finds that 'most believers, including some who are really persuaded of the opposite, approach the sacraments only as symbols and ceremonies'<sup>37</sup> – but in her belief that, like any social collectivity, the Church is prone to idolatrous

<sup>34</sup> NR, 236.

<sup>35</sup> Félix Le Dantec, *Athéisme* (Paris: Flammarion, 1907). The following remark is characteristic of Dantec's outlook: 'Je crois à l'avenir de la Science: je crois que la Science et la Science seule résoudra toutes les questions qui ont un sens; je crois qu'elle pénétrera jusqu'aux arcanes de notre vie sentimentale et qu'elle m'expliquera même l'origine et la structure du mysticisme héréditaire anti-scientifique qui cohabite chez moi avec le scientisme le plus absolu. Mais je suis convaincu aussi que les hommes se posent bien des questions qui ne signifient rien. Ces questions, la Science montrera leur absurdité en n'y répondant pas, ce qui prouvera qu'elles ne comportent pas de réponse.' Quoted at <http://agora.qc.ca/mot.nsf/Dossiers/Scientisme> (Accessed on 18 Feb 2009).

<sup>36</sup> FLN, 308. (My emphasis.)

<sup>37</sup> WG, 45.

self-adulation and, in this regard, no different from the worldly revolutionary movements that it has traditionally opposed.<sup>38</sup> Even her friend and spiritual mentor Fr Perrin, she thought, was not immune from the subtly suggestive powers of the religious institution of which he was himself a member. Reflecting on Perrin's attitude towards the affliction of those who are outside the Church, for example, she tells him:

It also seems to me that when one speaks to you of unbelievers who are in affliction and accept their affliction as a part of the order of the world, it does not impress you in the same way as if it were a question of Christians and of submission to the will of God. Yet it is the same thing.<sup>39</sup>

Weil's comment reveals something about the subtle ways in which the believer's spiritual loyalties may be remodeled or directed away from its original object, with unwitting discrimination marking the early stage of a progressively deepening idolatry. Looking back at the history of her own country, Weil finds that even as well-intentioned a Christian as Cardinal Richelieu (1585–1642), prelate and minister to Louis XIII, was not immune to the allure of stately power, and that he presents a good example of a Christian who failed to see that 'the welfare of the State is a cause to which only a limited and conditional loyalty is owed'.<sup>40</sup> The attempt to make the church a department of the state is, for Weil, just as misguided as the Church's use of the Inquisition as a means of eradicating heresy, since both involve an idolatrous worship of a (political or religious) collective.

Equally alarming, for Weil, is the tendency of such misdirected loyalties to make the citizen, whether atheist or believer, a willing accomplice in the state's wider political designs, including the colonization of foreign cultures and, as far as the Church is concerned, missionary expeditions:

The more fervent secularists, freemasons, and atheists approve of colonization ... as a solvent of religions, which in fact it is...

<sup>38</sup> *WG*, 54.

<sup>39</sup> *WG*, 95.

<sup>40</sup> *NR*, 115. *Op. cit.*, For a different interpretation of Richelieu's motivations, see D. P. O'Connell, *Richelieu* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968). Among other things, the author argues that, contrary to appearances, 'Richelieu's policy was not so much to make the Church a department of the state, as to make France a theocracy, with the church interlocked with the state and permeating secular activity with its moral authority' (139). Weil would certainly have applauded such a permeation of the secular with the religious, though she would probably not find O'Connell's reading entirely convincing.

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French colonization does indeed disseminate some Christian influence and also some of the ideas of 1789; but the effect of both is comparatively slight and transitory. It could not be otherwise, given the method of propagating those influences and the vast discrepancy between our theory and our practice. The strong and durable influence is that of unbelief or, more accurately, of scepticism.<sup>41</sup>

If the religious believer is prepared to condemn the militant atheist's use of colonization as a 'solvent' of religion, then how can she condone the Church's missionary ventures if these have similarly deleterious effects, both materially and spiritually? Readers familiar with the *Letter to a Priest* will recall Weil's personal response to the question: her confession that she would 'never give even as much as a sixpence towards any missionary enterprise';<sup>42</sup> her belief that, far from having Christianized the African and Asian continents, such enterprises merely 'brought these territories under the cold, cruel and destructive domination of the white race';<sup>43</sup> her disappointment at the Church's failure to condemn punitive expeditions to avenge the missionaries it had lost;<sup>44</sup> and her conviction that these missions have caused the irretrievable loss of valuable sources of spiritual illumination.<sup>45</sup>

Weil's concern for these uprooted cultures and peoples and her opposition to colonization and Christianization by force are rooted in her understanding of Christ's own mission, and the *manner* of his encounter with those who did not (yet) believe:

[It] was in any case never said by Christ that those who bring the Gospel should be accompanied, even at a distance, by battleships. Their presence gives the message a different character; and when the blood of the martyrs is avenged by arms it can hardly retain the supernatural efficacy with which tradition endows it. With Caesar as well as the cross, we hold too many aces in our hand.<sup>46</sup>

It is clear to Weil that, insofar as the cross is crucially important for an understanding of Christ, it must also inform the believer's conception of her relation to God. Among other things, this means that '[one] may not debase God to the point of making Him a partisan

<sup>41</sup> *SE*, 197.

<sup>42</sup> Simone Weil, *Letter to a Priest*, tr. A. F. Wills, with an introduction by Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 2002) (references indicated by *LP*), 18.

<sup>43</sup> *LP*, 17.

<sup>44</sup> *LP*, 18.

<sup>45</sup> *LP*, 19.

<sup>46</sup> *SE*, 197.

in a war',<sup>47</sup> whether in the Old Testament, by the Church of the Middle Ages,<sup>48</sup> or in Jeanne d'Arc's letters to the King of France.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, contemplating even a short excerpt from one of these letters, one finds it difficult not to agree with Weil that, in spite of the saintly aspects of her character, 'there is something essentially false' about her story, something bound up with *prestige*:

I am sent by God, the King of Heaven, to chase you one and all from France... If you refuse to believe these tidings from God and the Maid, when we find you, we shall strike you and make a greater uproar than France has heard for a thousand years... And know full well that the King of Heaven will send the Maid more strength than you could muster in all your assaults against her and her good men-at-arms. We shall let blows determine who has the better claim from the God of heaven.<sup>50</sup>

The pertinence of Weil's observations for religious fundamentalism, especially the more militant and fanatic kind, need hardly be pointed out. For her, all atrocities conducted in the name of God or any other deity constitute a *reductio ad absurdum* of any pretensions to religious witness, an ironic lapse into the very idolatry that is ostensibly being attacked. Here, the atheist who worships God 'in his impersonal aspect', i.e. lives just as much in the *spirit* of Christ as Weil herself was doing until she discovered the truth of the cross, is surely at one with the believer here.

But isn't the *language* of religious belief – i.e. talk of divine creation, original sin, angels and saints, incarnation, intercessory prayer, atonement, grace, eternal life, etc – so radically at odds with the terms in which an atheist would couch her experience of the world that it would be seriously misleading to amalgamate the two? Surely, someone who engages in 'God-talk' is *ipso facto* expressing a different conception of reality from someone who does not?

Weil is not denying that the world of a Christian like Francis of Assisi is radically different from that of an atheist like Arthur Schopenhauer, nor is she asking us to let the Stoic detachment and self-effacing attitude of the latter make us oblivious to the wider conceptual framework of which it forms a part. But she is asking how much, if anything, a speaker's employment of religious vocabulary

<sup>47</sup> *NB*, Vol. 1, 55.

<sup>48</sup> *NB*, Vol. 2, 502.

<sup>49</sup> *NB*, Vol. 1, 25.

<sup>50</sup> *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, tr. and ed. Daniel Hobbins (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 134–135.

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can reliably reveal about his attitude to life and the world at large. Even Félix Le Dantec begins his book *Athéisme* with a dedication (to his mentor Alfred Giard) in which he resorts to the very language whose meaning his book is designed to undermine:

Dieu merci, mon cher maître (voilà, je l'avoue, un début bizarre pour un livre sur 'l'athéisme, mais il faut bien parler français), Dieu merci, l'on n'est plus brûlé aujourd'hui pour ses opinions philosophiques; on n'a plus besoin d'héroïsme pour dire ce que l'on pense.<sup>51</sup>

When Dantec insists that one must, after all, speak French, he is, of course, merely generalizing about a common practice in any language whose historical development involves religious associations, as the casual use of expressions like 'Thank God!', 'For Christ's sake!', 'Jesus!', 'Bloody hell!', or 'I'll be damned!' readily illustrate. Nor should Dantec, descended as he was from a devout Catholic family in the Bretagne, be reprimanded for preferring the more emphatic '*Dieu merci*' to '*heureusement*' or, even worse, advised to consult an *index verborum prohibitorum* compiled especially for atheists like him. And while Dantec's linguistic habits are part of, perhaps even reinforce, the kind of profanation in which religious symbols become mere fashion accessories and holy sacraments are diluted into 'lifestyle options', they neither intend to deceive, nor are they mistaken for a religious confession. However, there are other and more sinister examples of God-talk, by comparison with which Dantec's '*Dieu merci*' seems trivial and harmless. Consider, for instance, the following:

Come what may, I shall always love God, pray to Him and adhere to the Catholic Church and defend it, even if I should be expelled from it.<sup>52</sup>

[All] that there was and is on this earth was created by God and animated by God. Foolish ... people have created the fable, the fairytale, that our forefathers worshipped gods and trees. No, they were convinced, according to age-old knowledge and age-old teaching, of the God-given order of this whole earth, the entire plant- and animal-world.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Daniel, *Athéisme*, 1: 'Thank God, my dear Maître (there, I admit it, a strange opening for a book on "atheism", but one had better speak French), thank God that we are no longer burnt for our philosophical opinions, that it no longer requires heroism to say what one thinks.' (My translation)

<sup>52</sup> Peter Padfield, *Himmler: Reichsführer – SS* (London: Mcmillan, 1990), 3. Entry in Himmler's diary, dated 15.12.1919.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

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No, ... don't talk to me about this sort of hunting. I don't care for so crude a sport. Nature is so wonderfully beautiful, and every animal has a right to life.<sup>54</sup>

These remarks were all made by the same individual, over a period of twenty years. Taken on their own, they seem to reflect different aspects of a continuous and admirable devotion to the Catholic faith, including the firm belief in a divinely-ordained natural order in which animals are accorded a prominent place. Unfortunately, the character of this spiritual narrative – which, incidentally, belongs to Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945) – underwent a radical transformation, from fervent profession of Catholicism (1919) to wholesale rejection of Christian ritual (1936):

I should like to say some things about all the festivals, all the celebrations in human life, in our life, whose Christian forms and style we cannot accept inwardly, which we can no longer be a party to, and for which, in so and so many cases, we have not yet found a new form.<sup>55</sup>

Having attended his own father's Catholic funeral in the previous year, Himmler admitted that he had merely done so out of respect for his father's beliefs, even though he did not share them himself:

I myself, in my personal case, have acted in that way. My father was – according to the tradition of our family—a convinced Christian, in his case a convinced Catholic. He knew my views precisely. However, we did not speak on the religious issue ... I never touched on his convictions and he did not touch on mine.<sup>56</sup>

As for the religious practices of his parents' generation, he knew that it would be difficult for them to become accustomed to the modified baptismal, burial and other public rites which he envisaged for the new *Reich*:

Please! *Jawohl!* One cannot change people of seventy. There is no point in upsetting the peace of mind of people of sixty or seventy. Destiny does not require that, nor our own ancestors of the earliest times – who merely want us to do it better in the future.<sup>57</sup>

It was not long before Himmler and his fellow *Gruppenführer* did begin to do it 'better', by instituting new birth or name-giving

<sup>54</sup> Padfield, *Himmler: Reichsführer – SS*, 351.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

ceremonies in which a ‘sponsor’ would hand the child a silver birth tankard from which she could drink as she was growing up, and solemnly declare: ‘The source of all life is *Got*... From *Got* your knowledge, your tasks, your life-purpose and all life’s perceptions flow. Each drink from this tankard be witness to the fact that you are *Got*-united.’<sup>58</sup> Commenting on the Nazis’ use of the word ‘*Gott*’, the Himmler biographer Peter Padfield rightly points out that ‘[the] word was given only one ‘t’ in the transcription, allegedly the old Germanic spelling, but it was chiefly useful, probably, to distinguish the SS God from the conventional Christian *Gott*.’<sup>59</sup>

Simone Weil’s reaction to this example would, I believe, have at least three aspects. First, she would agree with Padfield that it illustrates a defilement – in every sense of the word – of God’s name. Second, she would ask us to recall the equally idolatrous demeanour of the Ancient Romans and draw our attention to various structural analogies between their thinking and Nazi ideology. In fact, *The Need for Roots* contains a highly illuminating remark in which she does exactly that:

[The Romans] felt ill at ease in their all too vulgar idolatry. Like Hitler, they knew the value of a deceptive exterior of spirituality. They would have liked to take the outer coverings of an authentic religious tradition to act as a cloak for their all too visible atheism. Hitler, too, would be pleased enough to find or found a religion.<sup>60</sup>

Third, her thoughts would linger on the nineteen year old Himmler’s profession of undying loyalty to the Catholic faith, noticing both its ironic and, considering the rest of Himmler’s biography, more tragic aspects. In this context, one is not only reminded of Saint Peter’s betrayal of Christ, but of Weil’s penetrating comments on its genesis:

St. Peter hadn’t the slightest intention of denying Christ; but he did so because the grace was not in him which, had it been there, would have enabled him not to do. And even the energy, the categorical tone he employed to underline the contrary intention, helped to deprive him of this grace. It is a case which is worth pondering in all the trials life sets before us.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Padfield, *Himmler: Reichsführer – SS*, 174.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>60</sup> *NR*, 273.

<sup>61</sup> *NR*, 180–181. See also, *FLN*, 161.

Unlike St Peter's betrayal of Christ, Himmler's betrayal of the Catholic faith was neither acknowledged nor atoned for, the cult of the *Führer* drawing him ever further away from the God of his father.

### 3. 'Purifying' Atheism and Orthodox Christianity

In light of Weil's observations about (idolatrous) atheism and its alliance with scientism, her harsh verdict even on the spiritual condition of the faithful – '[t]he majority of the pious are idolaters' – and her conviction that, unless our faith is deep, we ourselves will be 'creating by contagion men who believe nothing at all',<sup>62</sup> her assessment of our relation to the Cross must appear both sobering and disheartening.

If her diagnosis is accurate, then how are 'our diseased minds'<sup>63</sup> to be cured of these ills, and what role could a 'purifying' atheism play in this cure? Weil's answer must be pieced together from remarks scattered across her oeuvre, and since her whole way of thinking is inimical to systematizing and theorizing, one must not expect a comprehensive and unified account of the matter. Even so, the general direction of her thought may be summarized as follows:

(i) Apart from the idolatrous kind discussed above, there is a species of atheism that purifies the notion of God by, for example, purging it of anthropomorphism and thus highlighting the nature and radical otherness of God's being:

A case of contradictories which are true. God exists: God does not exist. Where is the problem? I am quite sure that there is a God in the sense that I am quite sure my love is not illusory. I am quite sure that there is not a God in the sense that I am quite sure nothing real can be anything like what I am able to conceive when I pronounce this word. But that which I cannot conceive is not an illusion.<sup>64</sup>

The atheist rejects belief in a personal God, whether he be conceived as a giant policeman in the sky, an entity whose existence and whereabouts might be determined by empirical evidence, or a being who might be held to account for his actions, who might get angry and vengeful, or change over time, etc.<sup>65</sup> For Weil, proper contemplation

<sup>62</sup> *SE*, 197.

<sup>63</sup> *NR*, 266.

<sup>64</sup> *GG*, 114.

<sup>65</sup> Simone Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, tr. Arthur Wills and John Petrie (London: Routledge, 2002) (references indicated by *OL*), 168.



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of the atheist's rejection of such a god can give the believer a deeper understanding of what 'God' means, and is therefore to be welcomed.

(ii) Purifying atheism gives its complete assent to the necessity governing the visible world *without*, however, mistaking the order of that world for a proof of God's non-existence.<sup>66</sup> This attitude not only mirrors the *amor fati* of the Stoics, but is analogous to the Christian believer's loving acceptance of God's will:

Whatever a person's professed belief in regard to religious matters, including atheism, wherever there is complete, authentic and unconditional consent to necessity, there is fullness of love for God; and nowhere else. This consent constitutes participation in the Cross of Christ.<sup>67</sup>

When Weil speaks of necessity, she has in mind the impersonal and mechanical relations of cause and effect in the physical world, as well as the psychological propensities that characterize us in our interactions with each other. It is an important part of her understanding of creation that, even though 'God has entrusted all phenomena, without any exception, to the mechanism of this world',<sup>68</sup> it would nevertheless be wrong to conclude from this that suffering is specifically sent to particular individuals as ordeals. Rather, '[God] lets Necessity distribute them in accordance with its own proper mechanism.'<sup>69</sup> Human suffering, in other words, must not be justified or explained (away) by God's arbitrary interference in his own creation. Instead, it should be seen as an ineliminable part of the material 'veil' between God and man, one whose mechanism expresses a kind of obedience to the divine will. Weil uses the example of a shipwreck to illustrate her thought:

The sea is not less beautiful in our eyes because we know that sometimes ships are wrecked by it. On the contrary, this adds to its beauty. If it altered the movement of its waves to spare a boat, it would be a creature gifted with discernment and choice and not this fluid, perfectly obedient to every external pressure. It is this perfect obedience that constitutes the sea's beauty.<sup>70</sup>

It may be difficult to hold on to this perception of the sea when it causes the sailors difficulties or even costs them their lives, but

<sup>66</sup> *NR*, 266.

<sup>67</sup> *IC*, 184.

<sup>68</sup> *NB*, Vol. 2, 361.

<sup>69</sup> *WG*, 73.

<sup>70</sup> *WG*, 129.

Weil still insists that, just as a man should cherish the needle handled by his departed wife, so the material world, 'on account of its perfect obedience', deserves to be loved by those who love its Master.<sup>71</sup> Weil does not see in this attitude a recipe for passivity and quietism vis-à-vis human affliction, however. On the contrary, she would commend an atheist like Docteur Rieux in Camus' *La Peste* precisely for his Stoic and courageous struggles against such affliction, no matter how much they may be thwarted by forces beyond his control. Weil died too young (1943) to have read *La Peste* (1947), but it is worth noting that, when Camus himself began to read Weil's work while on a lecture tour in New York, in 1947, he was so impressed by it that he soon began to publish it in his *Collection Espoir*, a book series he had founded with Gallimard. Over the years, nine volumes of Weil's work would appear in this series. Camus' interest in Weil is, perhaps, not surprising when one considers the intellectual affinities between the two authors. Like Weil, Camus had a deep appreciation of Ancient Greek culture and civilization; was familiar with, and highly respectful of, Christian thought – he even wrote a Master's thesis on 'Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism' – supported political activism without placing his faith in the revolutionary movements of his day; and counted among his best friends such thoughtful and serious believers as the poet René Leynaud, a Resistance comrade who would be executed by the Germans in 1944, and Jean Grenier, who had been a fellow student at the University of Algiers.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, Camus always thought of his atheism as an entirely *personal* affair, not as the only tenable conclusion to be drawn from sober and impersonal philosophical reflection. As he emphasized in a speech at the Dominican monastery of Lautour-Maubourg, in 1948: 'I wish to declare ... that, not feeling that I possess any absolute truth or any message, I shall never start from the supposition that Christian truth is illusory, but merely from the fact that I could not accept it.'<sup>73</sup>

(iii) The purifying atheist does not believe in his own, continued existence beyond the grave – or what the late D. Z. Phillips has aptly called 'a transcendentalized version of 'See you later',<sup>74</sup> – but nevertheless views the world he inhabits as a home. As Weil puts it:

<sup>71</sup> *WG*, 128.

<sup>72</sup> James Woelfel, *Albert Camus on the Sacred and the Secular* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 25.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>74</sup> D. Z. Phillips, 'Dislocating the Soul', in *Can Religion Be Explained Away?* D. Z. Phillips (ed.) (London: Macmillan, 1996), 247.

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Not to believe in the immortality of the soul, but to look upon the whole of life as destined to prepare for the moment of death; not to believe in God, but to love the universe, always, even in the throes of anguish, as a home – there lies the road toward faith by way of atheism.<sup>75</sup>

On Weil's account, the idea of death as complete annihilation is preferable to a belief in the soul's temporal progression beyond the grave because it highlights the significance of *life*, of what the individual becomes, and of what she will (eternally) remain when her life has expired. 'The thought of death', Weil says, 'gives a colour of eternity to the events of life. If we were granted everlasting life in this world, our earthly life, by gaining perpetuity, would lose that eternity whose light shines through it.'<sup>76</sup> Thus, an atheist who takes this attitude towards death will not be indifferent to the way her life goes, but will instead want to prepare herself for the final hour, similarly to the way in which a believer would prepare for it by 'dying' to the world and detaching herself from all that might get in the way of her salvation. Both would agree on the significance of a life's narrative unfolding one way rather than another, and on what it would mean to speak with any depth about the meaning of death.

(iv) Our atheist will reject false consolations, including the hope of future compensations for sufferings undergone and losses sustained in the past. Contrary to common assumptions about the psychological 'benefits' of religious belief, Weil takes the view that 'religion, in so far as it is a source of consolation, is a *hindrance* to true faith,'<sup>77</sup> and that this is also why the atheist's rejection of such hopes *may* reveal a deeper appreciation of human suffering and bereavement. These must not be cheapened or absorbed into a general theory in which their meaning is diluted – something that theodocists are unwittingly doing as they grapple with the problem of evil – but recognized for what they are. In his moving memoir *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis captures well the spirit of Weil's own thinking on the subject. Contemplating the loss of the woman he loves, Lewis records:

You tell me, "she goes on", But my heart and body are crying out, come back, come back... But I know this is impossible. I know that the thing I want is exactly the thing I can never get. The old life, the jokes, the drinks, the arguments, the lovemaking, the tiny, heartbreaking commonplace. On any view whatever,

<sup>75</sup> *NB*, Vol. 2, 469.

<sup>76</sup> *FLN*, 275.

<sup>77</sup> *GG*, 115. (My emphasis)

to say, “H. is dead”, is to say, “All that is gone”. It is a part of the past. And the past is the past and that is what time means, and time itself is one more name for death, and Heaven itself is a state where “the former things have passed away”. Talk to me about the truth of religion and I’ll listen gladly. Talk to me about the duty of religion and I’ll listen submissively. But don’t come talking to me about the consolations of religion or I shall suspect that you don’t understand.<sup>78</sup>

(v) Atheists or ‘infidels’ who are free from self-adoration, whose relation to their fellow men is marked by pure compassion, and whose love demands nothing in return, are, in Weil’s view, ‘as close to God as is a Christian, and consequently know Him equally well, although their knowledge is expressed in other words, or remains unspoken.’<sup>79</sup> As we saw in connection with Himmler, the use of religious symbolisms or utterances no more vouches for true, Christian discipleship, than its absence from a person’s life and thought signifies its opposite. If ‘infidels’ exhibit supernatural virtue, then, as Weil rightly insists, ‘such men are surely saved.’<sup>80</sup>

A good illustration of the kind of atheism Weil has in mind here is provided by the literary character of Axel Heyst, in Joseph Conrad’s novel *Victory*. While Heyst’s restless travels and conscious avoidance of close personal attachments suggest an uprootedness and anxiety that do not entirely fit Weil’s requirement that one love the universe ‘as a home’, and even though Heyst’s general conception of the world bears a much closer resemblance to the pessimist outlook of a Schopenhauer than it does to an agnostic humanist, he nevertheless responds to his neighbour’s plea for help with an admirable spontaneity and generosity, expecting nothing in return. Conrad already draws our attention to these traits early on in *Victory*, as Heyst is approached by an acquaintance called ‘Morrison’, who is about to lose his livelihood – an old brig – unless he can pay the fine that will keep it from falling into the hands of the Portuguese authorities. Having just described his predicament to Heyst, Morrison adds:

Upon my word, I don’t know why I have been telling you all this. I suppose seeing a thoroughly white man like you made it impossible to keep my trouble to myself. Words can’t do it justice; but since I’ve told you so much I may as well tell you more. Listen. This morning on board, in my cabin, I went

<sup>78</sup> C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 24–25.

<sup>79</sup> *LP*, 22. See also, *LP*, 20.

<sup>80</sup> *LP*, 20. See also, *FLN*, 84.

down on my knees and prayed for help. I went down on my knees!<sup>81</sup>

The ensuing exchange, apart from touching on the notion of prayer, also reveals much about the character of Morrison's relation to God:

'You are a believer, Morrison?' asked Heyst with a distinct note of respect.

'Surely I am not an infidel.'

Morrison was swiftly reproachful in his answer, and there came a pause, Morrison perhaps interrogating his conscience, and Heyst preserving a mien of unperturbed, polite interest.

'I prayed like a child, of course. I believe in children praying – well, women, too, but I rather think God expects men to be more self-reliant. I don't hold with a man everlastingly bothering the Almighty with his silly troubles. It seems such cheek. Anyhow, this morning I – I have never done any harm to any God's creature knowingly – I prayed. A sudden impulse – I went flop on my knees; so you may judge –'<sup>82</sup>

Heyst's response to Morrison's confession is unhesitating and generous: 'Oh! If that's the case I would be very happy if you'd allow me to be of use!' he tells the latter, leaving him greatly bewildered by this unexpected offer. Such things do not, in Morrison's experience, happen very often, so this must either be a miracle and Heyst has been sent from God, or it is a case of deception and Heyst is, in fact, an emissary from the Devil. But Morrison's fears are soon allayed:

'I say! You aren't joking, Heyst?'

'Joking!' Heyst's blue eyes went hard as he turned them on the discomposed Morrison. 'In what way, may I ask?' he continued with austere politeness. Morrison was abashed.

Forgive me, Heyst. You must have been sent by God in answer to my prayer. But I have been nearly off my chump for three days with worry; and it suddenly struck me: 'What if it's the Devil who has sent him?'

'I have no connection with the supernatural', said Heyst graciously, moving on. 'Nobody has sent me. I just happened along.'

'I know better,' contradicted Morrison. 'I may be unworthy, but I have been heard. I know it. I feel it. For why should you offer—'

<sup>81</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Victory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 65.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

Heyst inclined his head, as from respect for a conviction in which he could not share. But he stuck to his point by muttering that in the presence of an odious fact like this, it was natural.<sup>83</sup>

#### 4. Atheists, Believers, and Divine Judgment

Looking back on Weil's remarks about atheism and idolatry, some of her Christian readers might well agree with her condemnation of the first, idolatrous kind of atheism, and yet wonder whether her attempted *rapprochement* between the 'purifying' type of atheist and the Christian believer does not come at too high a price, even for those who are prepared to give their atheist neighbors a sympathetic hearing. After all, Axel Heyst is not – despite the phonetic similarity and certain aspects of his demeanour – an incarnation of Christ, someone who could truly *save* a man like Morrison, not just from bankruptcy, but from despair over his suffering, or over the point of his life as a whole.

Heyst's gesture may have led Morrison to place his trust in this particular man, Axel Heyst, perhaps it has even restored his faith in humanity at large, but none of this seems to cut to the *core* of his religious convictions. Imagine, for the moment, a Morrison who, instead of being helped by Heyst, is callously dismissed by him, subsequently losing his precious brig to the Portuguese and, through no fault of his own, receiving the kind of beating that leaves the victim permanently crippled in body and soul. Would even the most compassionate atheist be able to offer an innocent sufferer like Morrison any *hope* that will speak to his need for the restoration of justice? And would such hope, if it could be given, not have to involve the kind of consolation Weil would reject? The question is pertinent because of the light its answer would shed, not merely on the atheist's (or Axel Heyst's) conceptual distance from the believer, but on Simone Weil's relation to orthodox Christianity. Suppose further that we asked a character like Morrison, for example, how he had managed to retain his faith in the face of all the injustices he had endured, and he replied as follows:

This innocent sufferer has attained the certitude of hope: there is a God, and God can create justice in a way that we cannot conceive, yet we can begin to grasp it through faith. Yes, there is a resurrection of the flesh. There is justice. There is an 'undoing'

<sup>83</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 67.

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of past suffering, a reparation that sets things aright. For this reason, faith in the Last Judgment is first and foremost hope.<sup>84</sup>

Would Morrison's belief in the resurrection of the flesh be just as clear an instance of 'false consolation' as his belief in an 'undoing' of past suffering? Would it not depend on how these beliefs informed Morrison's life and thought more generally – for example, whether they deepened his love of his neighbors, or cheapened his sense of what their affliction meant to them? And couldn't Weil agree that an adequate elaboration of the affirmation '*Spes mea in Deo*' should contain the thought that

Grace does not cancel out justice. It does not make wrong into right. It is not a sponge which wipes everything away, so that whatever someone has done on earth ends up being of equal value... Evildoers, in the end, do not sit at table at the eternal banquet beside their victims without distinction, as though nothing had happened.<sup>85</sup>

While I do not think that Simone Weil would have an unequivocal response to these questions – she was not a dogmatist, either philosophically or religiously – the general tenor of her answer is disclosed in two remarks concerning the resurrection. One of these occurs in a letter to her Dominican friend Fr Perrin, written shortly before her departure from Marseille, on April 16, 1942:

Once I have gone, it seems to me very improbable that circumstances will allow me to see you again one day. As to eventual meetings in another world, you know that I do not picture things to myself in that way. But that does not matter very much. It is enough for my friendship with you that you exist.<sup>86</sup>

The second appears in correspondence with the French priest Fr Couturier, to whom she wrote in the autumn of the same year:

[If] the Gospel omitted all mention of Christ's resurrection, faith would be easier for me. The Cross by itself suffices me.<sup>87</sup>

In an interview, Albert Camus once confessed that, while he had a deep sense of the sacred, he did not believe in a future *life*.<sup>88</sup> It is

<sup>84</sup> Benedict XVI, *Saved in Hope* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 90.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>86</sup> *WG*, 59.

<sup>87</sup> *LP*, 34

<sup>88</sup> Woelfel, *Albert Camus on the Sacred and the Secular*, 18.

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because, for him, untiring revolt against affliction and suffering do *not* come with the prospect of a future life and rewards in heaven, that Weil would think herself closer to him than to many of her fellow Christians. Their faith, she would insist, has yet to be purified through an encounter with just such an atheist.

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