

To Personalise or not to Personalise


Simone Weil's Struggle in her Understanding of God

Tyrone Grima

ABSTRACT This paper focuses on the theology of the philosopher Simone Weil, analysing the inherent struggle between the notion of the impersonal and the personal God, strongly present in her writings. The first part of the paper focuses on Weil's *point de départ*, in which she maintained that the relationship between humanity and God should not be a personal one. This premise is rooted in Weil's apophatic spirituality. It proceeds by giving an analysis of the dynamics in the notion of the impersonal God, juxtaposing it against the mystical experiences of Simone Weil herself. Weil's spiritual journey led her to integrating the two polarities. The second part of the paper focuses on an integrative model that can be derived from Weil's writings through her "spirituality of contradiction." In the face of the struggle, Weil believed in the importance of staying in the uncomfortable space of the unknown, without rejecting either polarity. The paper concludes by demonstrating the relevance of this integrative model to contemporary society as a vehicle of integrity in the path towards wholeness.

KEYWORDS detachment; integration; mysticism; polarities; relationality

✉ Tyrone Grima, Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), University of Malta, 91, Ta' Lieni Triq Raymond Caruana Gudja GDJ1011, Malta  tyronegrima@gmail.com  0000-0001-8965-8893

©  FORUM PHILOSOPHICUM 25 (2020) no. 1, 37–52
ISSN 1426-1898 E-ISSN 2353-7043

SUBM. 13 January 2020 Acc. 30 March 2020
DOI:10.35765/forphil.2020.2501.3

The spirituality of Simone Weil (1909–43), as well as the philosophical paradigms which underpinned it, have provoked questions and stirred a degree of controversy ever since Weil started sharing her thoughts and doubts about Catholic dogmatic teachings with a number of religious priests during her stay in the south of France in the Second World War (Pétrement 1973, 606–9). Despite the negative reactions of some of them, Weil persevered and never refrained from delving deeper, a process which continued posthumously through the engagement of scholars and devotees with her thoughts as exposed in her texts. One of the fundamental “controversial” themes that is at the core of Weilian spirituality is the notion of God. The tension between the faith in a personal God and the belief in an impersonal one underlies the essence of Weil’s relationship with the Transcendent. Simone Weil’s question is not whether God exists or not. The existence of God is a question that Weil never pondered upon at length. Many years prior to her mystical experiences,¹ in her initial studies in philosophy, Weil had already rejected the need for the exploration of the existence of God since according to her, philosophically, this cannot be proved nor disproved (Perrin and Thibon 2003, 27). It is only in the post-mystical experience, and as a result of deep engagement with a spectrum of sacred texts from Christian, pre-Christian and Eastern sources, that the question on the subject resurfaces but is expressed in a totally different manner. In this phase, Weil does not doubt the existence of God. Inspired by the words of John’s First Epistle, “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8b²), she maintains that God exists since love cannot be denied (1997, 126). The question has now become epistemological. Is this God a personalised one, a Divine being who relates directly with humanity? Or is God a philosophical concept, and so should only be seen as impersonal? Or is he (she or it or they) both personal and impersonal simultaneously, or neither of the two? The essence of this quest is the attempt to understand what type of relationship should be ensued between God and humanity. These questions, pivotal in the search of Simone Weil, will be explored in this paper that will also offer an integrative framework, referring to both Christian and non-Christian influences on the spirituality

1. A word of caution should be said with reference to Weil’s mystical experiences. Simone Weil never considered herself to be a mystic. It seems that Weil had doubts on her own mystical experiences, demonstrating her prudence and humility (Canciani 2000, 71). Hence, it is important to clarify that Weil’s reflection on the subject is not only influenced by these experiences but also by the engagement with a number of philosophical and spiritual texts. Having said so, her mystical experiences are an important landmark in her life, and it is correct to study this issue *a priori* and *a posteriori* to these experiences.

2. All Bible quotes come from New International Version.

of Weil, to address the tension between the personal and the impersonal notion of God.

THE PERSONAL GOD

In her exploration of the religious experience, Weil initially rejects the notion of a rapport with a personal God. She fears and distrusts this notion because it could lead the individual to project his own desires onto a fabrication of his construct of God, thus creating an ersatz (1997, 341). Weil's argument is that a personal God cannot be loved because human beings are so diametrically opposite to the nature of God. Human beings are finite, bound and defined by time and space, as opposed to a Divine reality that is infinite. The time-space boundary in the human experience makes anything beyond this boundary unfathomable and incomprehensible. A personalised and loving rapport cannot be established with what cannot be known or understood (Rozelle-Stone and Stone 2013, 115). It is best not to speak nor reflect upon the Divine, lest an erroneous portrayal is created (Davy 1954, 42). Her approach is rooted in the apopathic tradition which insists that the human being can only state what God is not. Weil sustains and validates this argument further by referring to a number of different religious beliefs. She cites Hinduism to demonstrate that the Divine cannot be recognised because ontologically it is beyond human comprehension (2009, 366). She also alludes to Taoist spirituality to show that the Wise Person should avoid desiring because the desire is deep-seated in the needs of the person rather than in the reality of what is being sought for (2009, 434). Weil's fear is that, in relating on a personal level with the Divine, the human being attempts to provide a definition of God by making use of signifiers that fall within his immediate and tangible reality, and which, by consequence, cannot correspond to the Transcendent. This belief in an ersatz could lead to severe and frightening consequences, such as the atrocities committed by the Institution of the Catholic Church towards minorities and dissenters throughout history (2013, 335), or the acts of exclusion still committed by political institutions in contemporary society, in the name of a personalised (and at times too convenient) God, used frequently as an excuse to undermine and possibly eradicate peripheral communities that do not conform to the status quo that the institution needs to uphold to ensure its might and power.

Weil not only contests the belief in a personalised rapport with God but also insists that the Divine does not relate with humanity in a personalised manner. According to Weil, absence of selfhood is characteristic of the relational dynamics on both ends. This perspective is embedded deeply in,

and cannot be divorced from, the spirituality of nothingness that permeates the thought process of Simone Weil. Her starting point is her theological understanding on creation. Weil describes the creative act as the withdrawal of the omnipresence of the Divine to allow necessity, including humanity, to exist (1997, 403). It is through de-creation that the relationship is established since the “creator, withdrew so that we may be.”³ The concept and popular thought of the all-powerful God, the *todo* par excellence, depicting the Divine as a supreme being is completely challenged by Weil’s contemplative reflections, that, to the contrary, convey the belief in an absent God, the God of nothingness. This is a God who forfeits selfhood for the relational to happen. According to this philosophical and theological framework, if there is at all a personal God, this God has clearly chosen to distance Himself in the relationship with humanity and has presented impersonalisation as the prime and only model for the nurturing of the relational.

AN IMPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DIVINE

Having established that relating to a personal God could lead to fallacies, and that the Divine does not seem to relate with humanity in a personalised way, the next step would be to grapple with the *modus operandi* of this relationship. The absence of selfhood does not imply within Weilian spirituality that God does not relate with humanity, but that He does so in an impersonal manner. Simone Weil roots this belief in her critical engagement with, and spiritual reflections on, the Gospels. She refers to the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30–37), where the Samaritan’s attention is completely focused on the injured man, even though he does not know him. Their relationship is not personalised, and the good deed is performed within an impersonalised and anonymous context. Weil also cites the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Mt 20:1–16), in which all the labourers are paid the same wage, irrespectively of the number of hours done (2013, 324). Weil infers that God’s salary is the salary of impersonality, that is, the approach of treating everyone in the same way, notwithstanding the profile or the history of the individual. If the love of God is impersonalised, by corollary, the relationship with humanity cannot be based on meritocracy (Lowtoo 2009, 10–1). The person does not merit the love of God based on anything that he might have done or said. The impersonal love of God is not dependent on how the human being reciprocates. To elaborate on this further, Weil insists that God’s love is ontological rather than action

3. “créateur, s’est retiré pour nous laisser être” (2002, 86). All translations from the original French text have been translated by the author of this study.

oriented. In the Divine reality, love is an essential feature of being. According to Weil, the attributive statement “God is love” is equivalent to the statement “an emerald is green.” Inasmuch as an emerald does not perform any action to produce its greenness, and remains green no matter what it does, or does not do, the same can be said of God (Weil 2006, 171). It is more correct to say that “He is love” than to say that “He loves” in order to shift the attention from the doing to the being. God does not choose to love. It is not a personalised action. God is love constantly and eternally by default. This ontological reality demonstrates that the love of God is impersonalised, that is, it does not necessarily require the presence or the mutuality of the other. By extending His nature of love to humankind, God is entering a relationship with humanity, albeit, as determined before, a hidden and mysterious one. This is not the portrayal of a malignant God who rewards His favourites or punishes those who disfavour Him. It is not a God who intervenes directly by granting personal favours or giving preferential treatment to any specific individual or to any ethnic reality (Weil 2006, 508) since He is a just God and, in fact, as Weil quotes numerous times in various writings (2013, 327), “He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Mt 5:45). She believes that, “trying to find a mark of the action of the Divine is an attempt to make God Himself a finite and limited form of goodness. This is blasphemy.”⁴ The impersonal God is a God who operates with everyone through love because He is love.

The notion of the impersonal God in Weilian thought is intimately linked with her Christocentric spirituality. Jesus Christ opted to relate with humanity through impersonalisation. In the mystery of the Incarnation, the immensity of the Divine nature encloses itself in the limited womb of the Virgin and is brought forth to the world in the forlorn, tiny village of Bethlehem. Indeed, the Incarnation augments even further the distance between humanity and God (Weil 1997, 421). Christ remains hidden for a further thirty years before He commences His apostolic mission and even though, in the narrative of His public life the Gospels depict a Christ who engaged in personalised relationships with other people, Weil emphasises that, nonetheless, Christ presents an impersonal notion of God as a model of perfection (2019, 236), a God that does not personalise (Mt 5:45). The zenith of impersonalisation is reached in the abandonment on the Cross with the cry “My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46b). The

4. “Essayer d’y trouver une marque de l’action divine, c’est faire de Dieu lui-même un bien fini, limité. C’est un blasphème” (Weil 2013, 343).

image that the Crucifixion portrays is not the image of a God who marks His presence through power and might, but of a seemingly defeated dying man. It is not a model based on action and imposition of selfhood, but on de-creation and *kenosis* (Infra, 14-15). God manifests Himself through the process of emptying (Weil 2006, 179–80).

These insights, delineating the approach that the Divine adopts in His rapport with humankind, lead to the question of how the human being can relate with the Transcendent in an impersonal manner. To be able to comprehend this perspective in more depth, it is essential to delve into Weil's understanding of anthropology. Undoubtedly, Weil believes that the human person has the capability of relating with the Divine. The sacredness present in every individual potentialises this relationship. However, although the sacred exists within every human being, it is not personhood, that is, the psychology and the physicality of the individual, that accounts for this sacredness (Weil 2019, 212–3). Personhood “is the aspect within the human being that belongs to error and to sin.”⁵ It is his inner faculty, permitting him to lean towards goodness, that makes him sacred. This faculty, which allows the human being to be attentive to injustice and affliction, can only be generated through the impersonal and the anonymous (Weil 2019, 216). Attention to the other, a key dimension in Weilian spirituality, is not possible through personalisation as the latter tends to retain the focus on the self. The relationship with the Divine occurs through the purification of personhood (Vetö 1994, 22) so that the “I” is no longer an obstruction that prevents the relational (Rozelle-Stone and Stone 2013, 118).

The principal obstacle to the dynamics of this relationship is the innate instinct, inherent in each human being, to gratify himself, through what Weil refers to as “realisation,” and secure his right of existence (2019, 218). It is an instinct of self-preservation that claims one's rights to ensure personal welfare. The human being believes that, through his actions, particularly in relational dynamics, he can attain set and established objectives that will guarantee his fulfilment and wellbeing. In doing so, the human being is choosing to be the locus of action, thus highlighting his personhood. Inspired by the *Bhagavad Gita* (herein abbreviated as *Gita*), Weil distinguishes between “the desire to have” and “the contemplation of being.” *Having* is the desire to possess, to capture the other and make him part of oneself. It is the active component in the psyche of the person that compels him to realisation. This can occur through various modes, including, and especially, through the process of knowing. The first step

5. “c'est la part en nous de l'erreur et du péché” (Weil 2019, 217).

of possessing necessitates the awareness, and the knowledge of the other. A personalised dynamic is required to be able to invade his space. *Being*, on the contrary, is infinite. It is a oneness that does not destroy through possession. Indeed, “even as all waters flow into the ocean, but the ocean never overflows, even so the sage feels desires, but he is ever one in his infinite peace” (*Gita*, II: 70). This is the desire to gaze and contemplate the beauty of the desired. It is a relationship that is not based on the imposition of the self, making the person feel special or unique. On the contrary, it is an impersonalised relationship whereby the Divine is contemplated, with full attention, but at a distance. In doing so, the person is participating in the process of de-creation by returning the space to God. It is within this absence, this void, this impersonal space, that the relational dynamics can flourish and mature.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF CONTRADICTION: AN INTEGRATIVE MODEL

This exploration and elaboration on the impersonalised relationship that God has with humanity would resolve the tension being explored in this paper, had it not been for the mystical experiences that Simone Weil had and which she describes briefly in her writings (*Supra*, ft. 1). In the Autumn of 1938, after several meditations on George Herbert’s poem *Love*, Weil claimed that Jesus Christ descended and seized her (Cabaud 1964, 170). A similar dynamic is also evident in the awakened dream that Weil depicts, in which she refers to a host, possibly Christ, entering her room and leading her to an attic where he nourishes her and promises to share his teachings with her (Cabaud 1964, 239). Weil is not referring to an impersonalised relationship in these contexts. In her writings, Weil attempts to explain this incongruity. She downplays the personalised intervention of the Divine by arguing that any human being who is open to Grace and submits to the will of God will experience a miracle (2013, 335). The crux of the issue is that many are the alleged saints but few are the ones who claim to have had mystical experiences. Why should this dynamic be personalised and manifested through a mystical experience in the life of Simone Weil, and in a more mundane, “normalised” and possibly impersonal manner in the life of another person who has equally submitted to the will of God? Why did God decide to intervene directly in the life of this woman in what seems to be a “personal favour,” and how can the insistence on a spirituality of nothingness and the belief in an absent God be converged with these experiences?

This incongruity can be addressed through the spirituality of contradiction. This dimension of Weilian spirituality, deeply rooted and embedded in

Greek philosophy,⁶ as well as in Eastern spiritualities⁷ and in the Christian faith⁸, was fundamental to the philosopher's journey in her quest for the Divine. Weil challenges the dualistic approach and believes that through the spirituality of contradiction the polarising schism between diametric opposites can be transcended (Weil 2002, 129). This approach is based on Platonic dialectics which embrace contradiction as a means of exiting from the oppression of the cave (Kempfner 1960, 131). It is a process that liberates the person from illusions in his search for integration and truth. Each polarity, on its own, could lead to a belief in an illusion. Integration is the "right equilibrium of contraries. This is a solution that humanity thirsts for today."⁹ It is through contradiction that humanity can attain maturity of thought (Gabellieri 2019, 442) and penetrate the depths of existence (Breton 2011, 85).

God can only be experienced by staying in the uncomfortable space whereby the limitations and constraints of the polarities of the personal and the impersonal are no longer perceived as a hindrance to growth (McCullough 2014, 246). In this space, opposing forces can become a point of encounter since "bridges depend on the balance of opposing forces, not to their mutual destruction but to create a positive force" (Allen and Springsted 1994, 205). Weil asserts that, unlike human beings who fear and avoid the ambiguity of contradiction, the Divine works and relates through it (2002, 63), "for what is impossible with man is possible with

6. Simone Weil refers particularly to Pythagoreanism and to the philosophy of Heraclitus whereby contradictions should not be opposed to each other and truth is attained in the tension of their integration. Harmony can only be achieved through the embracing of contradiction (2009, 421-2).

7. Weil refers extensively to *koans*, that is stories, statements or questions, popular as a format in Zen Buddhism, whose intention is to raise a doubt to spur growth (2002, 182). Hindu spirituality, particularly the Vedic school of spirituality, was also certainly influential in the development of the belief in the importance of paradox in Weilian spirituality. The *rishi* (sage) arrives at a stage in the spiritual journey where all polarities are contradictorily converged, where ignorance is blended with knowledge, and becoming with non-becoming, to form a new experience (2009, 358).

8. Simone Weil speaks about the beauty of contradiction in Catholicism in her reflections on the Sacramental life. In the Sacraments, the impure is mixed with the pure. This seemingly contradictory action brings forth powerfully the splendour of the Sacramental life, where through this paradox, the participant, despite his impurity and incompleteness, enters a new life with, and through, the completeness of Christ. A new reality is created in the sacramental life for the person who is transformed beautifully through the encounter with Christ (2002, 407). A further amplification on the concept of transformation will be explored at a later stage of this paper (Infra, 11-3).

9. "juste équilibre des contraires. Cette solution est ce dont les hommes ont soif précisément aujourd'hui" (Weil 1966, 55).

God” (Lk 18:27) since “my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways” (Is 55:8).

The contradiction between the belief in a personal and an impersonal God is summarised, according to Weil, in the opening petition of the prayer of the *Our Father* (Mt 6:9-13). The title *Father* makes the relationship personal, establishing the relationship between humanity and Divinity within the parental-filial paradigm. Paradoxically, the presence of God in Heaven, beyond the human reality, makes the relationship also simultaneously distant and impersonal (Weil 1997, 358). The fact that these notions are presented within the same phrase of the prayer that Jesus Christ offered as a model of communication with God demonstrates how essential contradiction is in the relational nature with the Divine. This steered Weil to the contemplation of the possibility of a personal relationship with an impersonal God, and at the same time of an impersonal relationship with a personal God (1997, 384). In this rapport, through the seeming contradiction, the beingness of the Divine is in a relationship with the human being, constantly challenging and purging him from all forms of illusion.

A model of spiritual growth can be deduced from the writings of Simone Weil to explain the stages of how the relationship with the Divine can be nurtured in an integrative manner. She depicts the spiritual journey as a process in which the individual commences in a relationship with a personalised God, believing that this is an authentic understanding of the Divine. At this stage the person does not have sufficient awareness to realise that he is shifting his own needs onto what he determines as being God, and often confuses the spiritual consolations which are typical of this initial stage of the relationship with the true nature of the Divine.¹⁰ Eventually this partial illusion is challenged, leading the person to a deeper relational level in which God is experienced as impersonal, a God stripped away from all the human constructs projected onto Him to satisfy the incompleteness of the human nature (Jersak 2015, 87–8). This form of detachment occurs in the spiritual journey so that the soul realises that its only essential need

10. “On peut croire qu’on pense à Dieu alors qu’en réalité on aime certains êtres humains qui nous ont parlé de lui, ou un certain milieu social, ou certaines habitudes de vie, ou une certaine paix d’âme, une certaine source de joie sensible, d’espérance, de réconfort, de consolation. En pareil cas la partie médiocre de l’âme est en complète sécurité; la prière même ne la menace pas” (Weil 2008, 275). “One might believe oneself to be thinking about God whereas in reality other human beings who have spoken to us about him are being loved instead, or a particular social context, or a certain life-style, or a certain peace of mind, or a source of joy, of hope, comfort, consolation. In any of the mentioned cases, the mediocre part of the soul is in total security; not even prayer can threaten it.”

is God and not the consolation that is felt by being in His presence. The comfort of the personalised element is no longer necessary and needs to be purified. As a result of this detachment, a distinction is made between the effect (the consolation), which can also be found in other earthly sources, and the Source itself, with or without the consolation. These first two stages also demonstrate that Weil realises the importance of the personalised aspect in the initial phase of the spiritual path. Although “the personal can be opposed to the impersonal, there is nonetheless a passage from one to the other.”¹¹

In the third stage, the soul enters the uncomfortable void of the contradictory, where the relationship of the individual with the Divine is personal and impersonal simultaneously (Weil 1966, 197). In this integration, the two polarities become a new reality. The transformation that ensues as a result of the relational dynamics in this stage should not be confused with what Weil referred to as “realisation” (Supra, 7). The individual is not becoming what he fantasised to be but is transformed into a new person, hence redefining the relationship and leading it to a more profound level (Weil 1997, 358). Simone Weil’s “prayer of de-creation” (2006, 279–80) is an appropriate, albeit challenging, example that distinguishes the difference between realisation and transformation. The initial reading of this prayer might lead to an interpretation in which Weil is seen as promoting a destruction of personhood. Within the framework of this reading, the person is a hindrance to spiritual growth and needs to be eradicated for a relationship with the Divine to occur. This interpretation would be incomplete and would not take into account Weil’s petition of transformation to become a new creature in her relationship with, and through, Jesus Christ. Her petition is a disposition to purify herself from realisation in order to be transformed. In another entry in her *Cahiers*, Weil also expresses the desire to become nothing.¹² This is not a plea for eradication but, on the contrary, a submission of will to form part of the experience of nothingness where the encounter with the Divine that leads to newness is possible. Weil is not recommending a destruction of personhood, but a transformation. Neither is she recommending that the impersonal should sabotage the personal in the relationship with the Divine. These insights demonstrate that Weil makes a

11. “Le personnel est opposé à l’impersonnel, mais il y a un passage de l’un à l’autre” (2019, 217).

12. “Mon Dieu, accorde-moi de devenir rien. À mesure que je deviens rien, Dieu s’aime à travers moi” (1997, 403). “My God, grant that I may becoming nothing. Provided that I become nothing, God can be loved through me.”

difference between personhood and personalism (Lowtoot 2009, 8) and that it is personalism that she opposes categorically in her spirituality. Personalism is the stance that emphasises the person or the being in the equation. Personhood has the potential of transforming itself into nothingness: one needs to have a sense of self to be able to detach from it and enter the void of the encounter. To detach from the self, a strong sense and recognition of the self is required initially (Janiaud 2011, 48). Personalism prevents this transformation because it rests on the specialness and adulation of the being of the individual, making such an emphasis a hindrance to any form of relationship. The integration between the personal and the impersonal can never occur if personalism is adopted since ontologically it halts the relational dynamic.

This model of integration reveals that Simone Weil's spiritual journey led her to grapple with the integration of these seemingly opposite polarities. Her approach, evident in her spirituality, is not dualistic since she does not concur with the synthesis of binary polarities (McCullough 2014, 214), but in the emerging of a third reality which prevents the other two from controlling and annihilating each other (Di Nicola and Danese 2014, 260). It is a state of liminality, which is neither on one side, nor on the other, but in the contradiction of the twixt.

In the spirituality of Simone Weil, this model of integration is reflected in its most perfect form in the mystery of the Redemption, particularly in the climactic point when the all-powerful Father unites with the broken Christ on the cross (2002, 249). In an earlier section of this study (Supra, 6), the Golgotha event was referred to as an example of the impersonalised nature of the love of God. Through the reflections presented by Weil, it is also possible to notice that the relationship between the crucified Son and the distant Father does not remain confined to the impersonal but transcends to a new reality of integration between the dialectical polarities. The Father, the creator of all being who enters a personalised relationship with His people, is juxtaposed against the Son, who embodies the renunciation of all being (Weil 2006, 130). Paradoxically, they are one God. The distance between the Father and the Son becomes the height of the loving experience (Weil 2002, 398). It is a height that remains inexplicable and surpasses all forms of relationality, reaching the harmony of the integration between the questioning of the Christ and the silence of the Father (Weil 2002, 406). There is an infinite distance in this silence between God and humanity, reflected in the distance between the Father and the Son (Pachet 2011, 64). No answer was given, and no emotional expression was manifested except for what can be interpreted as destructive

images of pathetic fallacy that highlight even more the hollow abyss of annihilation.¹³ The Crucifixion, which Weil even perceives geometrically as being a union of two contraries (the vertical against the horizontal), incarnates the historical moment of the absent and impersonal God, being so contradictorily present and personal, in such a way that absence and presence become a new experience—the act of redemption (Weil 2002, 89). It is precisely in this moment of total surrender, when the questioning stops and no answer is any longer expected, that the most elevated form of love ever in human history occurs. This is the historical moment that has captured in its perfection the integration between the personal and the impersonal, in which the totality of its inclusiveness (the redemption of the entire human race) becomes one with the totality of exclusiveness (Buber 2004, 64). It is a contradictory moment that defies any form of logic for “we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:23). This contradiction is reflective of the ontological nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son: the indwelling of the Son with the Father—“I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me” (Jn 14:10a) is one with a clear distinctiveness—“No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6b). This relationship, embedded in the contradictory, parallels the relationship between God and humanity.

THE INTEGRATIVE MODEL: A CHALLENGING OUTLOOK TO INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Simone Weil’s mysticism is deeply ingrained in human relationality. An examination of her understanding of the relationship with the Divine would not be complete unless it is also briefly studied against the dynamics of human relationships.¹⁴ In her spirituality, there is an evidently strong connection between interpersonal relationships and the relationship with God in such a manner that both feed into, and strengthen, each other (2006, 297). Weil’s psychology and anthropology are by default spiritual. The integrative model offers insights that can be applied to nurturing healthy interpersonal relationships. Through this model, humanity is induced and taught a different methodology of relationality.

13. “At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life” (Mt 27:51-52).

14. Human interpersonal dynamics in Weilian spirituality are not the main concern of this paper. For further analysis on this theme, see Grima 2018, 197–205.

The process of de-creation, leading to a new transformation, is fundamental to human relationships as well. A relationship will only flourish in the void and the detachment that both entities need to immerse in. If a relationship remains in the first stage, and does not proceed to impersonalisation, the relationship will not mature. In the first stage, as in the relationship with the Divine, there is an attempt to satisfy the gratifications of the ego, by projecting onto the other, one's needs and desires. Weil criticises any form of "stuckness" in this stage in a drastic manner by saying that it is better to die than to "love" someone by projecting onto him an imaginary role (1997, 381). In the transition to the second stage, Weil also challenges the binary schism between *subject* and *object*¹⁵ to avoid any form of dependency or power dynamic between two persons since "love, on the contrary, is the experience of wanting to close the gap between the subject and the object" (Rozelle-Stone and Stone 2013, 31). The person is liberated from his need to possess and can now gaze at the other. This leads to the repose of the person, committed to a relationship, and yet tranquil enough to be "free" of its attachments (Underhill 2002, 206), where the self no longer remains the protagonist of the narrative. A relationship cannot be dependent on the projected fantasies, spurred by the needs of the individual that prevent the living of relationships in the here-and-now; these should be purged through detachment. It is the impersonal and the anonymous, that is the detachment from personhood, that ensures that the relationship has been purified from egocentric gratifications or power dynamics. This leads, through the intervention of Grace, to the third stage, wherein the relationship experiences, albeit partially and sporadically, the transformation into a new reality, where there is no distinction between the personal and the impersonal. This new reality is the gift given by God to humanity to be able to relate profoundly and holistically (Gabellieri 2003, 498–9). It implies living in the present, focusing on the actual moment, being attentive to the other and not concentrating on actions projected in the possibility of a close or distant future. The relationship can transcend time and space since, through integration, emotion is transformed into a pure state where loving a person entails loving the existence of the other, without any form of acquisition or gratification through the relationship (Weil 1988, 397).

15. The influence of Japanese philosophy on Simone Weil can also be observed. She believed that when the distinction between the subject and the object is eliminated, *satori*, a state of enlightenment, is attained, leading to peace (2002, 75).

CONCLUSION

The spiritual journey of Weil is a transition from a philosophical notion of God to an experience of love that transformed her (Di Nicola and Danese 2002, 120). Through the analysis of this process, it is possible to deduce specific insights that are pertinent to contemporary society. The first major insight is that, although Weil warns against the perils of personhood in human development, her approach to the notion of the person needs to be studied in a holistic manner. Weil's thoughts on personhood also encompass her spirituality on the relational. The *point de départ* for any relationship, including the relationship with God, is the human person. The hindrances to relational growth occur due to personalism and the insistence of the self, particularly on his rights, and frequently as well on his gratifications. The method proposed by Weil to strengthen the relational is the annihilation of personalism. Contrary to contemporary belief, within the Weilian integrative model, it is annihilation that leads to growth (Di Nicola and Danese 2002, 231–2), but this needs to occur within the context of a healthy spiritual and psychological process, a process that fosters integration in which the seemingly opposite polarities are integrated and transformed. Hence, it no longer remains a question of making a choice between a personalised or an impersonalised notion of God. The crux of Weilian spirituality is found in the living out of opposite polarities, without destroying either of them (Gabellieri 2003, 336).

In her personal process, and in her attempt to grapple with the nature of the relationship between God and humanity, the experiences of the French philosopher led her to embrace contradiction as the methodology in engaging with the Transcendent. This paradoxical state enabled Weil to leap into the unknown and to have a profound encounter with the Divine which transcended the schism of the personal and the impersonal. Crucial to this process is Weil's Christocentric spirituality. Weil is aware that human limitation does not allow for the embracing of contradiction and it is only through the supernatural intervention of the spirit of Christ that this can occur. In Weil's life, reflected also by her writings, there is an evident parallel between the development of this spiritual process and the maturity of her relationship with Christ, which compelled her to venture further into the void of nothingness.

Finally, it is important to realise how relevant this integrative model is to humankind, particularly in light of contemporary social dynamics. It is a model that triggers discomfort with any form of religious extremism. The transition from the first to the second stage, that is from the personalised to the impersonalised notion of God, challenges excessive religiosity and devotionism, to the chagrin of the conservative and the traditionalist. Without this transition, the religious experience lacks depth and maturity since it

becomes a “comfort zone” and does not spur the person to grow. Weil’s methodology also highlights the need of transcending mere religiosity and defies skewed stereotypes that are not grounded enough in the journey of mankind. It serves as a stimulation to believers who remain stagnant in their faith, not prepared to release themselves from the structures that they have endorsed throughout their lives to able to reflect on them. Weil’s spirituality encourages these individuals towards purification from these structures by embracing a spirituality of contradiction. However, it also demands a depth and profundity in the mysterious dynamics of the faith, which may offer a struggle to the secular or rational person (Di Nicola and Danese 2002, 111–2). In a culture that is hostile to belief, Weil maintains that the relationship with God has an important role to play and to fulfil in today’s society, and the religious experience is a crucial aspect in the holistic development of the person. This intimacy in the experience of and relationship with God thrusts the soul to an inner *metanoia*, which is then translated and expressed through further relationality.

Simone Weil states that “as long as we have not eaten yet, it is not even necessary or useful to believe in bread. What matters is that we are hungry.”¹⁶ This reflection summarises the complexity of the dynamics of the relationship with the Divine, showing the constraints that the human condition experiences in its relationality with the Transcendent. Yet it also captures the deep longing present in every human being for depth. The hunger referred to by Weil is an invitation for all those who want to follow in the footsteps of the *via negativa* that Weil endorsed in her life to be ready to stay in this uncomfortable space in which the mystery of the encounter with the Divine, even though beyond human comprehension, is possible. It is by persevering in this void that the tension between the personal and the impersonal can be authentically transcended and integrated in the journey towards spiritual maturity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1962. *The Bhagavad Gita*. Translated by Juan Mascaró. London: Penguin.
- Allen, Diogenes, and Eric O. Springsted. 1994. *Spirit, Nature, and Community: Issues in the Thought of Simone Weil*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Breton, Stanislas. 2011. *La Passion du Christ et les Philosophes*. Paris: Cerf.
- Buber, Martin. 2004. *I and Thou*. London: Continuum.
- Cabaud, Jacques. 1964. *Simone Weil: A Fellowship in Love*. London: Harvill.
- Canciani, Domenico. 2000. *L’Intelligence et l’Amour: Réflexion religieuse et expérience mystique chez Simone Weil*. Paris: Beauchesne.

16. “Tant qu’on n’en a pas mangé, il n’est pas nécessaire ni même très utile de croire au pain. L’essentiel est de savoir qu’on a faim” (2008, 278).

- Davy, Marie-Magdeleine. 1954. *Introduction au Message de Simone Weil*. Paris: Librairie Plon.
- Di Nicola, Giulia P., and Attilio Danese. 2002. *Abissi e vette: Percorsi spirituali e mistici in Simone Weil*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- . 2014. "Personne et impersonnel chez Simone Weil." In *Simone Weil*, edited by Emmanuel Gabellieri and François L'Yvonnet, 258–63. Paris: L'Herne.
- Gabellieri, Emmanuel. 2003. *Être et Don. Simone Weil et la Philosophie*. Louvain: Editions Peeters.
- . 2019. "Le donné et le mystère. Notes sur phénoménologie, métaphysique et révélation chez S. Weil." *Archives de Philosophie* 72 (4): 627–44. <https://doi.org/10.3917/aphi.724.0627>.
- Grima, Tyrone. 2018. "The Dialectical Tension between Detachment and the Relational in the Life and Writings of Simone Weil (1909-1943)." PhD diss., University of Malta.
- Janiaud, Joël. 2011. "Simone Weil et le déracinement du moi." In *Lectures Politiques*, edited by Valérie Gérard, 35–52. Paris: Editions Rue d'Ulm.
- Jersak, Bradley. 2015. *From the Cave to the Cross: The cruciform theology of George Grant and Simone Weil*. Abbotsford, BC: St. Macrina Press.
- Kempfer, Gaston. 1960. *La Philosophie Mystique de Simone Weil*. Paris: La Colombe.
- Lowtoot, Bharatee. 2009. "Love for God's Necessity: the ambiguity of Simone Weil's hupmone." PhD diss., University of van Tilburg.
- McCullough, Lissa. 2014. *The Religious Philosophy of Simone Weil: An Introduction*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Pachet, Pierre. 2011. "L'écriture de Simone Weil dans 'L'amour de Dieu et le malheur.' Déploiement de la phrase et approfondissement de la pensée. Seconde lecture." In *Lectures Politiques*, edited by Valérie Gérard, 59–70. Paris: Editions Rue d'Ulm.
- Perrin, Joseph-Marie, and Gustave Thibon. 2003. *Simone Weil: As we knew her*. New York: Routledge.
- Pétrément, Simone. 1973. *La Vie de Simone Weil*. Paris: Fayard.
- Rozelle-Stone, A. Rebecca, and Lucian Stone. 2013. *Simone Weil and Theology*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Underhill, Evelyn. 2002. *Mysticism*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Vető, Miklos. 1994. *The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Weil, Simone. 1966. *Attente de Dieu*. Paris: Fayard.
- . 1988. *Œuvres Complètes: Premiers Écrits Philosophiques*. Vol. 1. Paris: Gallimard.
- . 1997. *Œuvres Complètes: Cahiers*. Vol. 2, (septembre 1941 – février 1942): *La Science et l'Impensable*. Vol. 6. Paris: Gallimard.
- . 2002. *Œuvres Complètes: Cahiers*. Vol. 3, *La Porte du Transcendant (février 1942 – juin 1942)*. Vol. 6. Paris: Gallimard.
- . 2006. *Œuvres Complètes: Cahiers*. Vol. 4, *La Connaissance Surnaturelle – Cahiers de New York et de Londres (juillet 1942 – juillet 1943)*. Vol. 6. Paris: Gallimard.
- . 2008. *Œuvres Complètes: Écrits de Marseille*. Vol. 1, *Philosophie, science, religion, questions politiques et sociales*. Vol. 4. Paris: Gallimard.
- . 2009. *Œuvres Complètes: Écrits de Marseille*. Vol. 2, *Grèce-Inde-Occitanie*. Vol. 4. Paris: Gallimard.
- . 2013. *Œuvres Complètes: Écrits de New York et de Londres*. Vol. 2, *L'Enracinement*. Vol. 5. Paris: Gallimard.
- . 2019. *Œuvres Complètes: Écrits de New York et de Londres*. Vol. 1, *Questions Politiques et Religieuses*. Vol. 5. Paris: Gallimard.