

‘He had come for me by mistake’

## *The dramatic and fascinating story of Simone Weil*

Gianni Criveller

---

**Gianni Criveller** is a religious scholar based in Hong Kong. He has specialised on China and Christianity and has authored, among other books, *Preaching Christ in Late Ming China* (1999); *From Milan to Hong Kong* (2008); *Portrait of a Jesuit: Matteo Ricci* (2010); *Five Hundred Years of Italians in Hong Kong and Macau* (2013, with others). He teaches in Hong Kong and Milan, and has written on authors such as *Éty Hillesum*; *Edith Stein* and *Simone Weil*. A fellow researcher at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, he is a missionary of PIME (Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions).  
 On the web: [giannicriveller.com](http://giannicriveller.com); [beyondthirtynine.com/author/gianni-criveller/](http://beyondthirtynine.com/author/gianni-criveller/)

---

### Introduction

In 2016, I made a much anticipated and deeply personal pilgrimage to a cemetery in Ashford, Kent in England. My good friends, Gina and Luigi, from the lovely town of Royal Tunbridge Wells, accompanied me on this simple and highly emotional visit.

After walking along Simone Weil Avenue, we arrived at the cemetery and looked for Simon Weil’s tomb. I knew it was located in the section reserved for Catholics and, therefore, I asked some bystanders to tell us where it was. However, they did not know about Simone Weil or her tomb. After a few minutes, we located the simple plaques that mark the very place where on 30 August 1943 she was buried.

Eight or nine people were in attendance at the interment, including Maurice Schumann and Simone Deitz. The former, a friend and collaborator of Weil, was the famous voice of *Free France* in London and was to become one the most prominent leaders of post-war France and Europe.

As the priest who was supposed to preside at the funeral missed the train, Schumann took the task of saying a prayer and a few words on himself. Simone Deitz was also close to Weil in the last year of her life, first in New York and then in London, where both women were part of the Free French resistance.

We will talk more about Deitz’ association with Weil later in this narration, as she is the person who baptised Simone Weil before her death. I address this later in the essay.

But let us go back to our visit to Weil’s tomb. I asked Gina to read a short poem written by Weil a few months’ before her death.

Most of the present article is about this poem, which is Simone’s emotional testament to the fundamental issue of her life, her relationship with Jesus and the Church. It was a precious and moving moment that we took away with us and will cherish for a long time.

### Simone Weil

Simone Weil, French social activist, spiritual writer, philosopher and mystic of Jewish origin was born in Paris on 9 February 1909.

*Simone Weil was one of the most remarkable women of the twentieth, or indeed of any other century... She was almost the perfectly typical passionate, revolutionary, intellectual woman... she made up her own revolution out of her vitals... she could introject all the ill of the world into her own heart.*<sup>1</sup>

Literature Nobel Prize laureate, Albert Camus, a friend of the family, was deeply influenced by her thought. In 1951, he wrote to Simone’s mother saying:

*Simone Weil, I maintain this now, is the only great spirit of our times and I hope that those who realise this have enough modesty to not try to appropriate her overwhelming witnessing. For my part, I would be satisfied if one could say that in*

## SIMONE WEIL

*my place, with the humble means at my disposal, I served to make known and disseminate her work whose full impact we have yet to measure.*<sup>2</sup>

Poet, Thomas Stearns Eliot, in the preface to her writing, *The Need for Roots*, wrote:

*We must simply expose ourselves to the personality of a woman of genius, of a kind of genius akin to that of the saints. Perhaps 'genius' is not the right word... Agreement and rejection are secondary: what matters is to make contact with a great soul. Simone Weil was one who might have become a saint. Like some who have achieved this state, she had greater obstacles to overcome, as well as greater strength for overcoming them, than the rest of us.*<sup>3</sup>

Her influence reached out beyond European borders. The Chinese *Culture Christians*, a group of scholars who sparked the hope of a new cultural season for Christianity in China in the 1990s, refer to her as their prototype and inspirational figure.

They especially value the anti-establishment, irregular and anti-institutional elements of Simone Weil's Christian faith and her existence as a Christian without baptism and outside the Church. As we will see, although a believer in Jesus, she refused until nearly the end of her life, to enter the Catholic Church, objecting to its dogmatic pronouncements and condemnations.

However, the notion that she died without baptism prevailed for few decades after her death and still persists in some quarters, in spite of strong evidence of the contrary. We will return to this point.

Her fascinating story has attracted the attention and the admiration of people all over the world. She speaks especially to those who struggle with faith, the reality of suffering and being part of the institutional Church.

Her struggles and failures, and even her death, touch and speak to the heart of many contemporaries, as she discovered Christianity after passing through syndicalism, anarchism, communism and an in-depth study of oriental religions.

### **The religion of slaves**

Three episodes illustrate Weil's early sympathy toward the ideal of Communism. In December 1931, she hosted fugitive Soviet leader, Leon Trotsky, and his wife at her parents' house.

In 1935, Simone worked in a Renault factory for some time to share the plight of the workers. But soon became physically and spiritually exhausted, as the work was too heavy a task for her fragile frame. In 1936, she volunteered for service in the Spanish

Civil War. Her revolutionary enthusiasm, mitigated by her refusal to participate in direct combat, resulted in a bitter failure, as she accidentally injured herself and had to withdraw.

Her parents then took her to Portugal to recuperate. During that time, Simone took part in a religious procession in a fishermen's village.

*The little Portuguese village was, like me, very wretched. I was alone. There was a full moon over the sea. The wives of the fishermen were, in procession, making a tour of all the ships, carrying candles and singing what must certainly be very ancient hymns of a heart-rending sadness. Nothing can give any idea of it. I have never heard anything so poignant. There the conviction was suddenly borne in upon me that Christianity is pre-eminently the religion of slaves, that slaves cannot help belonging to it, and I among others.*<sup>4</sup>

This statement is remarkably different from the Marxist doctrine of religion as the opium of the people. This first mystical-like episode in her life marks the beginning of her distancing herself from Marxism and her leaning towards Christianity. Trotsky acknowledged this, while writing, on 30 July 1936, to his comrade, Victor Serge.

*I knew her very well, I have had long discussions with her. For a period of time she was more or less in sympathy with our cause, but then she lost faith in the proletariat and in Marxism.*<sup>5</sup>

Even after her time in Portugal, Simone did not get well and her parents send her to Italy in 1937, hoping for a recovery. In Assisi, where she spent two *marvellous days*, something unexpected happened: she felt the compulsion to fall to her knees in prayer.

*There, alone in the little twelfth century Romanesque chapel of Santa Maria degli Angeli (the Porziuncola), an incomparable marvel of purity where Saint Francis often used to pray, something stronger than I was, compelled me, for the first time in my life, to go down on my knees.*<sup>6</sup>

The following year, while spending Holy Week at the Benedictine monastery in Solesmes in France, Simone experienced something that "marked her forever." She was emotionally wretched and was afflicted with a particularly painful bout of headaches, a condition that devastated her all life.

In the darkness of the chapel she tried, through tremendous concentration, to identify the pain she was suffering with the passion of Christ. She described her experience with poignant words, saying:

*I was able to rise above this wretched flesh, to leave it to suffer by itself, heaped up in a corner,*

*and to find a pure and perfect joy in the unimaginable beauty of the chanting and the words. In the course of these services, the thought of the Passion of Christ entered into my being once and for all.*<sup>7</sup>

As we had seen already, Simone's entire life was profoundly marked by physical pain.

She describes her illness, with dramatic words, in a letter to Joë Bousquet few years later on 12 May 1942.

*For twelve years I have suffered from pain around the central point of the nervous system, the meeting-place of soul and body; this pain persists during sleep and has never stopped for a second. For a period of ten years, it was so great, and was accompanied by such exhaustion, that the effort of attention and intellectual work was usually almost as despairing as that of a condemned man the day before his execution, and often much more so, for my effort seemed completely sterile and without even any temporary result... I spent several weeks of anguished uncertainty whether death was not my imperative duty—although it seemed to me appalling that my life should end in horror.*<sup>8</sup>

In the same letter to Bousquet, she describes how she experienced, through her pain, the love of God and Christ.

*At a moment of intense physical pain, while I was making the effort to love, although believing I had no right to give any name to the love, I felt, while completely unprepared for it (I never read the mystics), a presence more personal, more certain, and more real than that of a human being; it was inaccessible both to sense and to imagination, and it resembled the love that irradiates the tenderest smile of somebody one loves. Since that moment the name of God and that of Christ have been more and more irresistibly mingled with my thoughts.*<sup>9</sup>

A young Englishman was also present in Solesmes during Holy Week in 1939. He introduced her to a poem, entitled *Love*, by the 17th century English metaphysical poet, George Herbert. Simone was moved by the poem and memorised it:

*Often, at the culminating point of a violent headache, I make myself say it over, concentrating all my attention upon it and clinging with all my soul to the tenderness it enshrines. I used to think I was merely reciting it as a beautiful poem, but without my knowing it the recitation had the virtue of a prayer. It was during one of these recitations that Christ himself came down and took possession of me... I felt in the midst of my suffering the presence of a love, like that which one can read in the smile on a beloved face.*<sup>10</sup>

Herbert's baroque poem contains images and themes that Simone made her own, as we will see below.

The poem has two protagonists: Love, a transparent representation of God; and an interlocutor, whom Simone identified as herself. She protests her unworthiness to receive love.

*Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back  
Guilty of dust and sin.  
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack  
From my first entrance in,  
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning  
If I lacked anything.  
'A guest,' I answered, 'worthy to be here.'  
Love said, 'You shall be he.'  
'I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,  
I cannot look on thee.'  
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,  
'Who made the eyes but I?'  
'Truth Lord; but I have marred them; let my shame  
Go where it doth deserve.'  
'And know you not,' says Love, 'who bore the  
blame?'  
'My dear, then I will serve.'  
'You must sit down,' says Love, 'and taste my  
meat.'  
So I did sit and eat.*<sup>11</sup>

### The absence and silence of God

In an original way, Simone reflected on the theme of affliction and of the afflicted. Reflecting upon biblical figures, especially Job and the same Jesus, she constructed a peculiar theology of affliction and of the cross. She anticipated over a few decades the theological investigation on God's silence.

*The great enigma of human life is not suffering but affliction. It is not surprising that the innocent are killed, tortured, driven from their country, made destitute or reduced to slavery, put in concentration camps or prison cells, since there are criminals to perform such actions. It is not surprising either that disease is the cause of long sufferings, which paralyze life and make it into an image of death, since nature is at the mercy of the blind play of mechanical necessities. But it is surprising that God should have given affliction the power to seize the very souls of the innocent and possess them as sovereign master. At the very best, he who is branded by affliction will only keep half his soul..."*

*Affliction constrained Christ to implore that he might be spared, to seek for consolation from man, to believe he was forsaken by the Father. It constrained a just man to cry out against God; a just man as perfect as human nature can be; more so, perhaps, if Job is not so much a historical character as a figure of Christ. 'He laughs at the*

## SIMONE WEIL

*affliction of innocent.' This is not blasphemy but a genuine cry of anguish. The Book of Job is a pure marvel of truth and authenticity from beginning to end. As regards to affliction, all that departs from this model is more or less tainted with falsehood.*<sup>12</sup>

In the very experience of affliction, quite paradoxically and incredibly, Simone experienced the reality of mercy and love of God.

*It is in affliction itself that the splendor of God's mercy shines, from its very depths, in the heart of its inconsolable bitterness. If still persevering in our love, we fail to the point where the soul cannot keep back the cry, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?", if we remain at this point without ceasing to love, we end by touching something that is not affliction, not joy, something that is the central essence, necessary and pure, something not of the senses, common to joy and sorrow: the very love of God.*<sup>13</sup>

### Always with the excluded

Simone had an intense correspondence with people deeply afflicted by suffering. One of them, Joë Bousquet (we mentioned him earlier), was a poet who, seriously wounded during the First World War, spent the rest of his life paralysed and locked in a room.

In 1941, in Marseilles, Simone met Joseph Marie Perrin, a Dominican friar, afflicted by nearly complete blindness. They discussed the possibility of Simone of receiving baptism. But Simone wanted to stay outside the Church, with those who were excluded by ecclesiastical condemnations.

If the Church excludes someone, for whatever reason, she wants to stay always and in anyway at his or her side.

Simone could not bear "the use of the two little words: anathema sit" (9), a Latin expression by which the supreme ecclesiastical authority declares *excommunication* of those guilty of doctrinal or canonical infractions.

*I should betray the truth, that is to say the aspect of truth that I see, if I left the point, where I have been since my birth, at the intersection of Christianity and everything that is not Christianity... I should like to draw your attention to one point. It is that there is an absolutely insurmountable obstacle to the Incarnation of Christianity. It is the use of the two little words anathema sit. It is not their existence, but the way they have been employed up till now. It is that also which prevents me from crossing the threshold of the Church. I remain beside all those things that cannot enter the Church, the universal repository, on account of those two little words. I remain*

*beside them all the more because my own intelligence is numbered among them.*<sup>14</sup>

Simone had harsh comments with respect to religious, or rather clerical, power exercised by the Church against those who infringed on her rules. The Church, according to Simone:

*... is guilty of an abuse of power when she claims to force love and intelligence to model their language upon her own. This abuse of power is not of God. It comes from the natural tendency of every form of collectivism, without exception, to abuse power.*<sup>15</sup>

The letter, written from New York in 1942 to the Dominican artist Marie-Alain Couturier, opens with the following words:

*When I read the catechism of the Council of Trent, it seems as though I had nothing in common with the religion there set forth. When I read the New Testament, the mystics, the liturgy, when I watch the celebration of the mass, I feel a sort of conviction that this faith is mine or, to be more precise, it would be mine without the distance placed between it and me by my imperfection.*<sup>16</sup>

One of her paradoxical expressions was that she was ready to die for the Church, but not to enter it. She wanted to follow the excluded even to hell. For this drastic empathy with the outcast, she, Simone, was defined as the "saint of the excluded" (André Gide).

When she was arrested in Marseille in 1942, for activity against the French pro-Nazi government, the judge threatened to throw her in the same jail cell occupied by women prostitutes.

Far from feeling humiliated, she, typically, disconcerted the judge with an unexpected answer. It would be an honour for her to be associated with the prostitutes and she was looking forward to sharing a prison cell with them.

### A private holocaust

Simone Weil died on 24 August 1943 in the town of Ashford (Kent, England) at the Grosvenor Sanatorium in Ashford and was buried in the Catholic section of the local cemetery. In a dramatic coherence with her ideals, she refused to receive medical treatment and sufficient food in solidarity with French people who were suffering under Nazi occupation. She was 34-years-old.

The self-sacrifice was, quite rightly, described as a private holocaust. An offering that would closely associate her to Jesus, who back in Solesmes "came down and took possession of me." It was during her stay at the Benedictine monastery that Simone

started the daily recitation of the Our Father. This practice led her to experience the loving and powerful presence of Jesus.

*The effect of this practice is extraordinary and surprises me, and surprises me every time, although I experience it each day, it exceeds my expectation at each repetition. At times the very first words tear my thoughts from my body and transport it to a place outside space where there is neither perspective nor point of view... Sometimes during this recitation, or at other moments, Christ is present with me in person, but his presence is infinitely more real, more moving, more clear than on that first occasion when he took possession of me.*<sup>17</sup>

Yet, Simone was never completely relieved from her poor physical and psychological conditions. She was, intellectually, an exceptional woman and yet she was afflicted with grave insecurities.

In medical literature, she is considered an emblematic case of a person afflicted with anorexic disorder, an ailment that might have contributed to her own death.

In the letter to Perrin, often called her "Spiritual Autobiography", she defines herself as a God's mistake.

*As I am going more or less with the idea of probable death, I do not believe that I have the right to keep it to myself. For after all, the whole of this matter is not a question concerning me myself. It concerns God. I am really nothing in it all. If one could imagine any possibility of error in God, I should think that it had all happened to me by mistake. But perhaps God likes to use castaway objects, waste, rejects.*<sup>18</sup>

### He came to get me by mistake

The persuasion that God came to her by mistake, the experience of being rejected, is dramatically narrated in a text, which was originally untitled, and is found at the end of the second notebook.

It is, occasionally, called *Prologue*, because, apparently, Simone intended to place it at the beginning of her *Notebooks*, when they would be published. However, at her death, this text, or poem, was still unpublished.

The narrative has two protagonists: their names are not mentioned, and their behaviour is mysterious and unpredictable. In the fashion of the obscure language of the mystics, Simone recounts her troubled relationship with Jesus and the Church.

Written a few months before her death, the poem is a parable of her life; her dramatic and unconventional

experience of Jesus. Quite obviously, he is the enigmatic guest with whom she shares some unforgettable days in a mysterious attic.

A garret that may represent the Church, for which she felt attraction and repulsion at the same time. She speaks of herself using the male gender, perhaps a reflection of her reluctance in recognising her femininity.

The influence of Herbert's poetry is recognisable, especially where Simone expresses the sense of indignity at the presence of the beloved. The charming friend, with whom she had spent a few unforgettable days, suddenly and quite abruptly rejects her.

The scene has quickly become disturbing: Jesus and Simone live a dramatic contrast and the attraction suddenly turns into violent rupture. This is Simone: she shuns like the plague all forms of romance and romanticism. She had even written:

*To desire friendship is a great fault. Friendship should be a gratuitous joy like those afforded by art or life. We must refuse it so that we may be worthy to receive it; it is of the order of grace. It is one of those things which are added unto us. Every dream of friendship deserves to be shattered... It is not chance that you have never been loved... To wish to escape from solitude is cowardice. Friendship is not to be sought, not to be dreamed, not to be desired; it is to be exercised.*<sup>19</sup>

Yet there are evidences that Simone was a woman with deep sentimental and emotional feelings. René Le Senne, her first philosophy teacher, described Simone as 'emotional and passionate'.

Suzanne Gauchon, her classmate and friend, wrote of Simone, "She had a boundless desire for tenderness, for communion, for friendship, but not always found the secret to getting what she craved for."<sup>20</sup>

In fact, when writing about friendship, Simone acknowledged that it "cannot be separated from reality any more than the beautiful. It is a miracle, like the beautiful. And the miracle consists simply in the fact that exists."<sup>21</sup>

We return to Simone's poem now. Thrown out by her beloved friend, she does not know how to find him. She realises then that she should not even look for him and that she must not return into that house.

Her place is with the excluded, among the castoff; perhaps in a prison cell, where the Marseille judge wanted to throw her some time before. But the last words, are like an anguished cry of hope, the hope of being still loved, after all.

## SIMONE WEIL

This dramatic and fascinating narrative is still little known outside the circle of Simone Weil's readers and experts. It still moves me every time I read it.

*He entered my room and said: 'Poor creature, you who understand nothing, who know nothing. Come with me and I will teach you things which you do not suspect.' I followed him.*

*He took me into a church. It was new and ugly. He led me up to the altar and said, 'Kneel down.' I said 'I have not been baptized.' He said: 'Fall on your knees before this place, in love, as before the place where lies the truth.' I obeyed.*

*He brought me out and made me climb up to a garret. Through the open window one could see the whole city spread out, some wooden scaffoldings, and the river on which boats were being unloaded. The garret was empty, except for a table and two chairs. He bade me be seated.*

*We were alone. He spoke. From time to time someone would enter, mingle in the conversation, then leave again.*

*Winter had gone; spring had not yet come. The branches of the trees lay bare, without buds, in the cold air full of sunshine. The light of day would arise, shine forth in splendor, and fade away; then the moon and stars would enter through the window. And then once more the dawn would arrive.*

*At times he would fall silent, take some bread from a cupboard, and we would share it. This bread really had the taste of bread. I have never found that taste again.*

*He would pour out some wine for me, and some for himself—wine which tasted of the sun and of the soil upon which this city was built.*

*At other times we would stretch ourselves out on the floor of the garret, and sweet sleep would enfold me. Then I would wake and drink in the light of the sun.*

*He had promised to teach me, but he did not teach me anything. We talked about all kinds of things, in a desultory way, as do old friends.*

*One day he said to me: 'Now go.' I fell down before him, I clasped his knees, I implored him not to drive me away. But he threw me out on the stairs. I went down unconscious of anything, my heart as it were in shreds. I wandered along the streets. Then I realized that I had no idea where this house lay.*

*I have never tried to find it again. I understood that he had come for me by mistake. My place is not in*

*that garret. It can be anywhere—in a prison cell, in one of those middle-class drawing rooms full of knick-knacks and red plush, in the waiting room of a station—anywhere, except in that garret.*

*Sometimes I cannot help trying, fearfully and remorsefully, to repeat to myself a part of what he said to me. How am I to know if I remember rightly? He is not there to tell me.*

*I know well that he does not love me. How could he love me? And yet deep down within me something, a particle of myself, cannot help thinking, with fear and trembling, that perhaps, in spite of it all, he loves me.<sup>21</sup>*

### On Simone Weil's baptism<sup>21</sup>

Weil's closest friend in the last year of her life was Simone Deitz. According to Deitz' testimony, the last months of Weil's life can be reconstructed as follows. On 15 April 1943, Simone Weil, while in London to support the French forces in exile, along with Charles De Gaulle and Maurice Schumann, was admitted at to the Middlesex hospital, suffering from tuberculosis.

Deitz, who closely followed Weil in both New York and London, accompanied her.

Weil asked for the French military chaplain of the Free French Forces, the Abbé René de Naurois. They had three difficult talks. According to Deitz, De Naurois refused to baptise Weil, because she still rejected the notion that unbaptised children are excluded from heaven.

In fact, the doctrine of the Church has never definitively retained the position held by De Naurois; and it excludes that doctrine completely now. On this point, therefore, Simone Weil was right and, the severe chaplain, wrong.

Deitz also said that De Naurois dismissed Weil as "too Jewish". De Naurois denied having made derogatory comments, but admitted that he felt irritated in the course of the talks. The confirmation by the Abbé de Naurois that the talks with Simone Weil in the hospital did take place and that they were difficult, give a strong and objective support to Deitz' story.

After the talks with De Naurois, Weil told Deitz, herself a Catholic convert of Jewish descent, that she was ready to receive baptism. Simone Deitz baptised Simone Weil in May 1943, using water from the tap and pronouncing the exact canonical formula: "I baptise you in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

As anticipated at the beginning of the article, the burial rite for Simone Weil was celebrated on 30 August 1943, at the Catholic section of the cemetery

in Ashford. Chaplain De Naurois was supposed to preside at the ceremony but, according to Deitz, he deliberately missed the train. Schumann was conveniently ready to read the customary prayers.

Eric O Springsted, the American scholar, related this testimony.

The source of this testimony affirms that the same Simon Deitz explained that she was unable to talk about the baptism because of an explicit prohibition from the mother of Simone Weil, at least as long as she lived.

Madame Selma Weil died in 1965. Accounts of Weil's baptism emerged in 1967 from Jacques Cabaud (based on the testimony of French author Michele Leleu) and in 1971, from Wladimir Rabi.

Their ultimate source was Simone Deitz, who, however, remained unnamed. In 1974, Weil's biographer, Simone Pétrement, dismissed the story as "out of character" and, consequently, Deitz's testimony was in fact silenced or never really heard in Europe.

In fact, Deitz was subjected to a good deal of snubbing from some quarters that found her story altered their established *image* of Weil. As a consequence, Deitz was never particularly eager to narrate her story, as she was humiliated by the fact that the authenticity of her witness came into question.

In the United States of America, however, where surviving members of Weil's family have been living for many decades, Deitz' story at last had an attentive hearing from Presbyterian theologian and scholar Eric O. Springsted.

Springsted is a cofounder and for 33 years was a director of the American Weil Society; editor of at least seven volumes on Simone Weil and one of the most prominent American scholars on her.

Deitz and Springsted talked and met twice in 1981. Springsted publicly related the story of Weil's baptism in 1984 at Notre Dame University. The same Deitz did so at Harvard University in 1988, where her presentation was videotaped.

Both occasions were conferences on Simone Weil organised by the American Weil Society. Still, especially in Europe, many have conveniently ignored or opposed this reconstruction, reaffirming the well-known position on Weil's refusal of baptism.

However, Weil's refusal was not absolute and unconditional. In 1942, in her *Spiritual Autobiography*, in which she rejects Perrin's gentle invitation to baptism, she says that God:

*... does not want it so far at least. But unless I am mistaken, I should say that it is his will that I should stay outside for the future too, except perhaps at the moment of death. Yet I am always ready to obey any order, whatever it may be.*<sup>23</sup>

Staying out of the Church was her specific vocation, in keeping with her universal thought, and Simone considered it as God's will. In the letter from Casablanca addressed to Perrin, through his secretary, Solange Beaumier (1942), this *vocation* was not without exception:

*My vocation imposes upon me the necessity of remaining outside the Church, without so much as engaging myself in any way, even implicitly, to her or to the dogmas of Christianity, in any case for as long as I am not quite incapable of intellectual work. And that is in order that I may serve God and the Christian faith in the realm of the intelligence.*<sup>24</sup>

In the same letter, for the second time, Simone reiterated she would to remain without baptism for life:

*except perhaps—only perhaps—if circumstances make intellectual work definitely and totally impossible for me.*<sup>25</sup>

From the same texts by Simone Weil, quite obviously, it is not possible to rule out that in the last months of her life, after being admitted to a sanatorium seriously ill, she had considered that the those extreme conditions to accept baptism were met.

Although this would support her case, to the credit of her sincerity, Deitz said that, at the time of baptism, Weil thought that she could continue working intellectually. Still, Weil's writings contain several instances that she considered the possibility of baptism all the time.

The thought of it was an option that she took always into account. When in New York, not too long before her death, Weil repeatedly insisted, at the end successfully, to have her newborn niece, Sylvie Weil, baptised. Yet, André, Simone's only brother, and his wife, Sylvie's parents, were not religious.

Now, the final assessment of whether or not Simone was baptised, as Springsted has rightly affirmed, rests entirely on the credibility of Simone Deitz.

Springsted has spent a great deal of transparent research on this issue, without any ideological prejudice. He presented to Deitz all possible objections. She always replied in a convincing manner.

Let's report the words in which Springsted assesses the issue:

## SIMONE WEIL

*Deitz has been consistent in the telling of the story over the years. Moreover she has no reason to lie, nor can I tell from an association that goes back to 1981 that she has ever shown herself to be given deliberate untruths. She herself has made no attempt to gain from the story—on the contrary—she has constantly avoided attempts to get her to come more public about it. Finally, she has not been at all interested in contributing to a hagiography. There is no reason to think Deitz would lie*<sup>26</sup> ■

## END NOTES

1. Kenneth Rexroth, "Simone Weil", in *The Nation*, 12 January 1957.
2. In a 1951 letter to Madame Weil, reported in *L'Express* of February 11, 1961. This quote is included in various studies, including Roy Pierce, *Contemporary French Political Thought*. Oxford University Press: London, 1966, 121.
3. Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*. London & New York: Routledge, 1952 (2003's reprint), viii.
4. *The Simone Weil Reader*, 14-15.
5. Quoted in Alfred Holl, *The Left Hand of God*, 1997.
6. *The Simone Weil Reader*, 15.
7. *The Simone Weil Reader*, 15.
8. *The Simone Weil Reader*, 90-91.
9. *The Simone Weil Reader*, 91.
10. *The Simone Weil Reader*, 15-16.
11. The text of Herbert's poem is available online. See <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/core-poems/detail/44367#poem> (accessed August 3, 2016).
12. *The Simone Weil Reader*, 441-442.
13. *The Simone Weil Reader*, 107.
14. *The Simone Weil Reader*, 21-22.
15. *The Simone Weil Reader*, 24.
16. Simone Weil, *Letter to a priest*, Penguin Books (2003).
17. *The Simone Weil Reader*, 18.
18. *The Simone Weil Reader*, 18.
19. *The Simone Weil Reader*, 361.
20. Nadia Fusini, *Hannah e le altre*. Torino: Einaudi 2015, 20-21.
21. *The Simone Weil Reader*, 361.
22. *The Simone Weil Reader*, 410-411.
23. Most information in this paragraph are from two studies by Eric O. Springsted "The Baptism of Simone Weil" in *Spirit, Nature and community*,

*Issues in the Thought of Simone Weil*. Albany: State University of New York University Press, 1994, 3-18, also available online [www.sunypress.edu/pdf/52976.pdf](http://www.sunypress.edu/pdf/52976.pdf); and "Simone Weil and Baptism" (2008) [www.laici.va/content/dam/laici/documenti/donna/culturasocieta/english/simone-weil-and-baptism.pdf](http://www.laici.va/content/dam/laici/documenti/donna/culturasocieta/english/simone-weil-and-baptism.pdf) (accessed September 24, 2014).

24. *The Simone Weil Reader*, 20.
25. *Waiting on God*, 22.
26. *Waiting on God*, 23.

## Bibliography

- Simone Weil, *Waiting on God*. New York: Routledge 1951 (2010 reprint).
- Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*. London & New York: Routledge, 1952 (2003 reprint).
- The Simone Weil Reader*, edited by George A. Panichas. New York: David McKay Company, 1981.
- This study is a radical expansion and revision of my previous three articles on Simone Weil articles:
- "Mi ha cercato per errore". Simone Weil, scarto di Dio." In (edited by) Alessandro Ramberti, *Uno scarto di valore a Bardolino*. Rimini: Fara editore, 2016, pp. 115-127.
- "Un inquietante testo mistico e poetico di Simone Weil": <http://samgha.me/2015/01/28/un-inquietante-testo-mistico-e-poetico-di-simone-weil/> (2015).

