



# FAITH & REASON

THE JOURNAL OF CHRISTENDOM COLLEGE

1985 | Vol. XI, No. 3, 4

---

## MATHEMATICS AND PROPHECY: FAITH AND REASON IN SIMONE WEIL

*Frederick A. Homann, S.J.*

---

*Simone Weil was born on February 3, 1909. She is remembered as a “mystic”, a social philosopher and an activist in the French resistance during World War II. She was a precocious child who, at six years of age, was quoting the French dramatic poet Jean Racine. In her youth, she gave herself to leftist causes and in 1936 joined an anarchist group in Spain. Her pacifism did not allow her to bear arms and so she served as the camp cook. While working in this capacity, she was badly scalded with boiling oil and went to Portugal to recover. Soon after this incident, Weil experienced a number of “mystical epiphanies” while kneeling in a chapel as a Gregorian plainchant was being intoned. She came to view her social concerns as “ersatz Divinity” and embraced Christianity.*

*Although she did not enjoy the benefit of writing in a formal theological tradition, she still saw the mystery of the Triune God reflected in all of reality, especially in the geometrical theorems of the Pythagorians. In this essay, Fr. Homann presents the thought of Weil who saw many traces of Christian mysteries in the ancient Greeks’ loving exploration of reality.*

Pythagoras and his disciples, and also Plato, followed that inward vision of theirs which was aimed at the truth, and this they did, not without the help of God; and so in certain things they were in agreement with the words of the prophets. They searched through truth in part and in whole and honored it by the formulations of their thought which were in clear harmony with the intelligible nature of things; for they had received an intimation of that which is related to truth itself.. Yet it was only when the Logos of God had been proclaimed that the full holy light blazed forth.

-Clement of Alexandria  
*Stromata* V, 5, 29, 2-6



ANY REMARKABLE PAGES IN THE PRIVATE NOTEBOOKS AND PUBLISHED PAPERS OF Simone Weil (1909-1943) purport to find in mathematics traces of God.<sup>1</sup> Evidently a central concern, her thoughts here give insights, and problems, both for the mathematician and the religious philosopher. In her vision, Greek geometry and Pythagorean study of the physical world not only reveal traces of God, but even provide ways of penetrating the Catholic faith mysteries of Trinity and Incarnation. She asks “How many mathematicians today regard mathematics as a method for purifying the soul and ‘imitating God’?”<sup>2</sup> Mathematics is salvific. It is a mysticism, as well as abstract speculation and the science of nature. To be sure,

contemporary critics, theological, mathematical, and philosophical, will demur. Yet her intellectual intensity demands a probe of her faith-reason synergisms. It is rewarding work: a synopsis of Simone Weil's ideas can give questions to ask and ways to be about the task of finding God in all things. Let us look closely and compare her ideas with a venerable Catholic tradition.

Weil's presuppositions and starting points lie in ancient Pythagoreanism. Through this conduit, she believed, there flowed a current of spirituality rooted in a divine revelation given to Noah and transmitted from prehistoric Egypt to postexilic Israel and Christianity, a primal revelation later evoked in Plato. The Pythagoreans represent the purest and best in Greek thought. Plato, the school's greatest disciple, must be taken at his word that he invented nothing, that he only follows a tradition he sometimes does, sometimes not identify. Plato's wisdom orients the soul to grace. Through his preserved (popular) works we reach Pythagorean spirituality. Plato was a genuine mystic, the father even of western mysticism, for Greek thought at its best was a search for bridges to relate the human condition and divine perfection. (Aristotle, in her reading, is a technical, modern philosopher, outside the Greek contemplative tradition.) Today we have Greek science, poetry, and philosophy almost as museum pieces. We do not use them vitally as bridges to God. Now only if our thirst is great enough, will the saving truth, rightfully ours, be given us. For Pythagorean texts and Plato's witness must be read lovingly, with "attention" (a notion we must examine later).

Today the depth of Pythagorean thought cannot be perceived except by using a sort of intuition. And one cannot exercise such an intuition except from inside; that is to say, only if one has truly drawn spiritual life from the texts studied.<sup>3</sup>

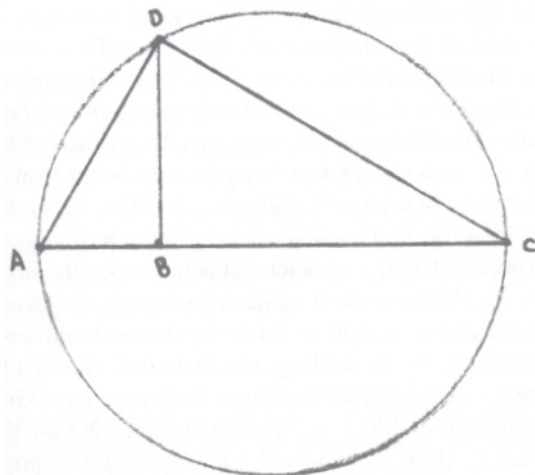
Weil proposes then this project:

To restore to science as a whole, (and to mathematics, the sense of its origin and veritable destiny as a bridge leading to God, not by diminishing, but by increasing precision in demonstration, verification and supposition, that would indeed be a task worth accomplishing.<sup>4</sup>

To those who want to understand, God speaks through geometry. Her claim is bold: "The appearance of geometry in Greece is a prophecy in the strictest sense of

the word, the most dazzling of all the prophecies which foretold the Christ."<sup>5</sup> How does she ground it?

The basis is mediation. Weil's French text term "mediation" has English renderings both as "mediation" and as "mean" or "median." It functions both in philosophy and in geometry.



Mathematical notes are useful here. A geometric proportion between three positive numbers  $a, b, c$  has the form  $a:b = b:c$ , or,  $a/b = b/c$ . The number  $b$  is the geometric mean, or mean proportional, of the numbers  $a$  and  $c$ . So 3 is the mean proportional of 1 and 9; it mediates 1 and 9. Among positive integers, only square numbers ( $4 = 2^2, 9 = 3^2$ ) are linked to unity by an integer mean proportional. What about the others: 2, 3, 5, ...? The Pythagoreans found these generate irrational square roots as means, real numbers that cannot be represented as the ratio of two integers. Weil conjectured that in the search for mean proportionals the Pythagoreans discovered geometry when they represented numbers by line segments and plane rectangles. We can get the mean proportional of two line segments representing the two numbers in an elegant way. A basic theorem of early Greek geometry showed the altitude of a right triangle inscribed in a semicircle was the mean proportional of the two base segments of the similar triangles:  $AB : BD = BD : BC$  ( $a:b = b:c$ ). Pythagoras, said an ancient record, offered God a sacrifice for discovery of this theorem. Weil thinks the Platonic text *Epinomis* 990d envisioned this determination of a mean proportional assimilating  $a$  to  $c$ :

What one ridiculously calls mensuration (geometria) is the assimilation of numbers not naturally similar among themselves. This assimilation becomes manifest when applied to the properties of plane figures, and this, to whomever is capable of thought, is a marvel which comes from God and not from men.

Mathematicians, in any event, could now deal in exact terms with relationships incomprehensible in terms of integers alone. The study of real numbers in terms of mediation could also be an introduction to the mysteries of faith, given in a simple, but striking, image.

The circle-diameter image of the mean proportional is, for Weil, a trace of God. Let the diameter be fixed, and let the circle rotate about its center.

This is the perfect image of the eternal act that is the life of the Trinity. The motion is one operation without change, circulating upon itself. Choose a point on the circle and look at its perpendicular projection on the diameter. As the circle rotates the oscillating movement of the image point on the diameter is the symbol of all growth and decay here, “an image made of successive and contrary ruptures of equilibrium,” a moving analog of active, invariant equilibrium. It is the projection of the divine life on earth. The diameter is bounded by the circle: God assigns a limit to all the becomings in this world.<sup>6</sup>

The altitude  $b$  of the inscribed right triangle is a mean proportional to the parts of the diameter  $a$  and  $c$ , on either side of the image. In this Weil saw the image of the Word, the mediation between God and man, the Incarnation, the Word made flesh.

Of course, the mean proportional was of great value in architectural and geometric theory, and in the theory of musical harmonics. Quite possibly, proportionality, for the Greeks, was the motivating force of geometric research insofar as many of their discoveries can be grouped around two problems: The search for a proportional mean between two square numbers, and the search for two proportional means between two cubic numbers. This acknowledged, Weil thought the true significance of early Greek mathematics, the basis of Greek contemplative science, was religious. *The Epinomis* text showed that the search for means came from revelation. Other texts lent support. The Pythagorean Philolaus (Diels<sup>5</sup> I, 412, fr. 11) claimed that mathematics applied first to divine things, theology, then by extension to human matters, to music, to technology:

You see that the essence and power of number

have validity not only in religious and divine matters, but also in all human efforts and relations, in everything connected with craft and music.

Multiple levels can be sought in a Pythagorean text of Diogenes Laertius (VIII, 33): “Friendship is an equality made of harmony,” and in one attributed to Philolaus: “Harmony is the unity of a mixture of many, and the single thought of separate thinkers.” These texts ground diverse remarks on the Trinity, on the communion of God and man, and on human interpersonal relations. The key to understanding is the mean proportional, mediation, but now in a theological sense.



*Simone Weil*

Mediation provides the best analogy for understanding the dogma of the Trinity, the one rigorous example of separate thinkers who think together. We cannot conceive of God as perfect save by understanding God as subject and object at once. If we think of God as *object*, then God is not act. If we think of God as *subject*, then to be in action God needs an object. The object cannot be creation. Otherwise creation would be necessary, not grace. Human mode of thought involves thinking subject (a person), object thought, and thought itself, the mediation of the two. To represent God, not as thing, but as thinking thought, it is necessary to represent three terms in divine thought, each a person though there is one God. The mediation, the thought itself, is active, a Being who thinks. This is the Word, the Image, the Wisdom of God. (So, in the Fourth Gospel, we should least inexactly translate Logos, not as Word, but as Mediation.)<sup>8</sup>

In brief, if friendship is “equality made of harmony, the common thought of separate thinkers,” then the Trinity is friendship par excellence, the supreme harmony.

Harmony is the union of contraries. The first pair in the ancient catalog of Pythagorean contraries was “One and Many,” unity and plurality. These constitute the Trinity. Weil suggests that Plato had the Trinity in



mind in *Timaeus* also, where he denominated the first pair of (Pythagorean) contraries as *Same* and *Other*.<sup>9</sup>

The second Pythagorean pair involved correlation of the limiting and the limitless (i.e. what receives its limitation *ab extra*). Here is the opposition between creator and creation. The limit (form) imposed by God on matter is number (the first principle of all limitation), taking the word in its widest sense. Again, mediation: Number is the intermediary between the One and the Limitless, in Plato's words.

The "One and the Many" is the Trinity, the first origin. Number appears in this scheme as second term of the opposition. If number and limit are identified, number-limit functions in a "Limit-Limitless" scheme of creation as first term, not unlike a mean proportional.

The second pair of contraries in God as creator produces in God a harmony and friendship, not defined just by the mystery of the Trinity, but also, *ad extra*. There must too be unity between the creative, ordering principle of limitation and the inert matter of indetermination. Not only the principle of limitation, but the inert matter and the union between the two, must be Divine Persons (axiomatic, for Weil). Matter cannot be Person. How resolve the problem? Only by passing to the limit, Weil tells us with poetic intensity:

There is an intersection between a person and inert matter; this intersection is a human being at the moment of death, when the circumstances preceding the death have been brutal to the point of making a thing of that person. This is a slave dying, a miserable bit of flesh nailed upon a cross.

If this slave is God, if he is the Second Person of the Trinity, if he is united to the first Person by the Divine Bond which is the Third Person, one has the perfection of harmony as the Pythagoreans conceived it, harmony in which is found the maximum distance and the maximum unity between the contraries.<sup>10</sup>

Early Greek proportion theory, then, was Weil's key to Pythagorean theological anthropology. Plato used the mean proportional to describe mediation between God and man. One is the symbol-name-number of God: The unit and source of all other number or logos. All created things have each a number as symbol, form, intelli-

gibility, name. Some, the squares, have, as noted, a special link with unity, an integer mean proportional. Plato held that:

The most beautiful of bonds is that which, to the highest degree, renders itself one with the terms which are bound. It is geometrical proportion, which, by essence, is the most beautiful for such achievement. (*Timaeus* 31c)



Weil gave an interpretation (admittedly not self-evident): The condition is truly realized when not only the first term, but the link itself is one, that is to say, God. Remember *Symposium* (202d). Here Plato used the same linking word (*metaxy*) to delineate the mediatory function of Eros between Divinity and man. Mediation and Love are essentially the same.<sup>11</sup> Comparing these texts with New Testament ones where Christ uses the same image for his own role as mediator (As the Father has sent me, so I send you; as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you), Weil saw Greek geometry as prophecy. Just as intelligence is a weakened equivalent of supernatural light, so is proportion, or ratio, (an intellectual geometric construct), a weakened equivalent of mediation, weakened, but a trace nonetheless. Weil wondered:

May we suppose that it is because the Greeks saw in geometry the image of the Incarnation (divine images, reflections of reality) that they put into it the amount, the intensity of attention, or religious attention which enabled them to invent the method of demonstration (Logos). What a staggering thought!<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, it was because the Greeks have such a need of divine verities, the mediation of the Christ, Weil thought, that even in the simple geometric image of these verities they needed the greatest certitude and precision.

A third level of insight. Pythagorean texts relate to our friendship with God, and to friendships among ourselves. Divine mediation descending, by analogy, into the world, pervades everything. It constitutes reality everywhere. But friendship is first friendship in God between Persons of the Trinity. Here is the prime analogue. The Divine Persons are equal. Human friendship

can only occur when there is an image of Divine equality between the friends. Perfect friendship involves perfect justice to each other:

Pure friendship is an image of the original and perfect friendship that belongs to the Trinity, and is the very essence of God. It is impossible for two human beings to be one while scrupulously respecting the distance that separates them, unless God is present in each of them.<sup>13</sup>

Human friendship is possible only if the friends renounce in the love of God their egocentricity, to recognize each other as equals. God can be mediator and principle of harmony; all true friendship comes from Christ.

The Greek search was, and ours is to be, made with “attention.”

Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object; it means holding in our minds, within reach of this thought, but on a lower level and not in contact with it, the diverse knowledge we have acquired which we are forced to make use of... Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it.<sup>14</sup>

It is a “patient waiting on God,” an idea dear to Simone Weil. Because God is the source of light, different kinds of attention are but attenuated forms of religious attention. One can think with fullest possible attention only of God, and, conversely, only with the fullest possible attention can one think of God. Prayer consists of attention. It is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable toward God. Paradoxically, by desiring God, one becomes capable of attention. The highest ecstasy is attention at its fullest. Yet attention itself is God’s gift. Grace helps us to concentrate attention more and more, to leave the idols of distraction, and to move our thoughts closer and closer to God. We confer, so far as it lies in us, the plenitude of reality upon the objects and creatures around us when we add to intellectual attention that even higher attention which is acceptance, consent, love. These objects can be recognized as traces of God: stellar galaxies, human love, Pythagorean geometry theorems. Remembering their mathematical structure, Weil remarks that

This is the discovery that intoxicated the Greeks: that the reality of the sensible universe is

constituted by a necessity whose laws are the symbolic expression of the mysteries of faith.<sup>15</sup>

Every time we practice this attention we destroy the evil in ourselves. Indeed, something in our soul has a greater and more violent repugnance for true attention than the body has for physical fatigue. Development of the faculty of attention, started in school studies, matured in reflection and research, terminates in prayer, in contact with God. Mathematics can be *amor intellectualis Dei*, research can be redemptive.

Weil’s early death allowed no development of these often sketchy ideas in response to critical review. No doubt, her interpretations have considerable esoteric strains and historical inadequacies. And her ideas have an affinity to esoteric Christian Hermetism. But we can be sympathetic to her proposals, the more so if we compare her work with that of her contemporary, Hugo Rahner, S.J. His *Greek Myths and Christian Mysteries* is an impressive effort to understand how Greek religious and literary traditions (Homeric ones, the *Odyssey* especially) were seen by early Christian theologians as presaging Christian belief:

In the contingencies of the history of civilization which prepared human speech for a revealing God, the Christian sees the finger of the spirit pointing towards Christ. The light that in the midst of human darkness blazed forth in Hellas was only borrowed sunlight, but Christ is the sun itself. And all that discourse of the finer spirits of Greece, all that talk, now whispered, now loud and eager, all that talk that argues such longing for the beautiful and the good, is no more than a wandering echo of a sound from out that mighty power of word and wisdom that rushes downward from the Logos. It is a gift of inner sight directed towards the truth but incapable as yet of its clear perception.<sup>16</sup>

Rahner allows but renews and widens the thought of Clement of Alexandria who saw wisdom in the suggestive symbolism of the ancients: Orpheus, Linus, Musaeus, Homer, and Hesiod. Their poetic psychagogy was, for the vast multitude, like a concealing curtain, destined to be torn away by Christian Greeks that myth might be changed to mystery. Rahner, like Weil, wrote amid the sorrow of World War II, painfully aware that the West no longer had faith in the divine message, and was no longer receptive to it. Both knew the man of pure intellect and

unrestrained technical development had no one but himself to talk to. Only an attentive faith heals our disease. Man only becomes human in God.

The efforts of Rahner and Weil are partially complementary, partially overlapping. Weil knew the Greek literary canon, but not, it seems, the Greek patristic corpus. She read Aeschylus, Sophocles, Plato, and Homer with Christian eyes. She also read with attention, with eyes of faith, the Greek mathematicians and physicists, and wanted to hear in them echoes of the Logos. This she did knowingly and reflectively, but in private. She did not read in a tradition, as Rahner did. Weil did not expect an uncommitted person, a godless one, would hear in these texts what she heard. Thus, about the question of God's existence, she noted that

The ontological proof, the proof by perfection, which, furthermore, is not a proof for the intelligence as such, but only for the intelligence animated by love, not only establishes God's reality, but also the reality of the dogmas of the Trinity, of the Incarnation, and of the Passion. This certainly does not mean that the dogmas could have been found by human intelligence without revelation. But once the dogmas have appeared, they impose themselves upon the intelligence if it is illuminated with love, with such certainty that it cannot refuse to adhere, even though these dogmas are out of its domain and the intelligence is not qualified to affirm or to deny them.<sup>17</sup>

Here, of course, she speaks of contemporary persons of faith reflecting on the material and intellectual world experiences, and finding traces of God both in today's world and in the texts of Athenian Greece. But there is more to be said.

Weil's suggestion that Pythagoras, or Plato, was a prophet of the Trinity is a thrust in a different direction. Commenting on the *Timaeus* she wrote:

If people read Plato in the same state of mind as they read the Old Testament, they would perhaps see a prophecy in these lines (36b). By this prodigious combination of symbols, Plato shows us in the heavens, and in the course of days, and of seasons, an image at once of the Trinity and of the cross.<sup>18</sup>

Rahner would not, I think, concur, but there may be precedents in Christian theology. Thus Cyril of Alexandria:

We find a knowledge of the Trinity even among the philosophers of Greece. For they say that their three hypostases exist at once together, with no intermediary between them, and as Mind is related to the First, so they say is the third, Soul, related to Mind, and they admit the comparisons of Begotten and Begetter. This we can see from the statement of Plotinus: Everything desires its Begetter, and loves it, especially when Begotten and Begetter are the same (V.1.6) (*Contra Julianum* 8 PG 76. 920).



Karl Rahner

Plotinus (205-270), it seems, had at best a distant knowledge of Christianity. His doctrine of the Three Hypostases was developed from Plato through the Middle Platonists, Alexander of Aphrodisias and Antiochus of Askalon principally, perhaps with an assist from Philo Judaeus. It is not clear whether Cyril thought that Trinitarian Christians could see the mystery in the pagan philosophers' texts, or whether, as did Weil, he held that the Greek philosophers themselves perceived, however dimly, the mystery. Weil could perhaps do this because of her belief in a primal revelation carried in the Orphic-Pythagorean tradition that remained invariant even with the coming of Christ.

Augustine was circumspect in this matter. As believer and theologian he sought patterns of Trinitarian intelligibility and of redemptive reconciliation by the Incarnation. His psychological analogies for the Trinity, the triple of mind, memory, and will, for example, did not enable an uncommitted person to rise to the Mystery; the Christian could use them to remember the Trinity. Anticipating Weil, Augustine, in *De Trinitate* (IV, 2. 4), looked at Christ's mediatorial redemptive work precisely as "armonic". For by nature, men are not God; by sin, men are not just. So God, having become a just man, interceded for sinful man with God. The sinner and the just man are at odds, but man and man go together. Fittingly, the sinner's death, in both body and soul, the result of a necessary condemnation, is averted through the death of the Just One, the result of a merciful will. Christ's one bodily death redeems our double death. Augustine then pauses over the "congruentia," "convenientia," "concinentia," "consonantia," and the relation of one to two ("unum



ad duo”), that he sees “in every compagination, or better, coaptation of the creature.” It is a harmony, he thinks, of a pattern with the musical harmony of tone and octave (*in ratio* 1: 2) that blends low and high voices. We all recognize the harmony because the Creator implanted it in us. *Vestigia Dei* are found through an inborn sense that makes us aware of harmony. Music, for Augustine the Platonist, is applied arithmetic. His ideas are heard as theme and variation in the later medieval Latin theologians of Chartres, as well as in Weil.

William of St. Thierry, the distinguished Trinitarian theologian of the twelfth century School of Chartres, like Weil and Pythagoreans and Platonists throughout the ages, was intrigued with mathematics and number. He held that

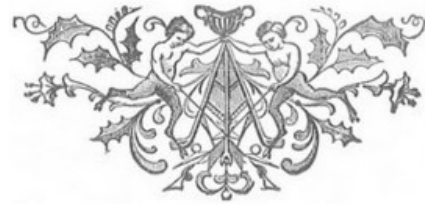
There are four kinds of reasoning which lead men to knowledge of the creator, namely the proofs (probationes) of arithmetic and music, or geometry and astronomy. They are to be employed succinctly (breviter) in this theology, so that both the product (artificium) of the creator may be seen in things, and what we have proposed may be intelligently (rationabiliter) shown.<sup>19</sup>

This is, of course, the *Quadrivium*, the “fourfold path,” of Boethius, whose texts grounded much of the thought of the School of Chartres. Geometry, in particular, provided a link between God and the world. With it Thierry could discover God in creation and explore the mystery of the Trinity. Noting that the Father creates all things in the Word, he cited Ps 61.11 (semel locutus est Deus) in support of a numerical approach to creation. Indeed, all things tend to the Divine One as root of all being. “Omne enim quod est, ideo est, quia unum est.” He remembers that Plato, with Pythagoras, identified the metaphysical principles of monad and dyad with God and matter, respectively. This let him explain the difference between God the Creator and his creation by contrasting the One that stands for eternity, divinity, and omnipotence of God, with the various changeable numbers that come forth from the One and stand for created things.

Thierry saw in Hebrews 1.3 (splendor et figura substantiae ejus) and John 14.9 (qui videt me videt Patrem) Scriptural support for mathematical analysis of the Trinity. The equilateral triangle mirrored the equality of the three Divine Persons. The Father, Source, is Unity. The Son is Unity begotten of Unity, as a square arises

from crossing a unit length segment into itself. Moreover

The square is appropriately predicated of the Son since this figure is judged more perfect than other (rectangles) because of the equality of its sides.<sup>20</sup>



Thierry moved likewise in mathematical images to the Third Person of the Trinity as Love and Bond. Some scholars see Thierry responsible for the representation of the liberal arts on the Royal Portal of Chartres Cathedral where Geometry and Arithmetic are at the very top of the archivolt, close, but subordinate to Divine Wisdom. Katzenellenbogen subscribed to this view because of Thierry’s confident use of the Quadrivium to explain theological truths. Thierry, he observed, used the two mathematical disciplines to define the Creation (sic) of the Son and His equality with the Father. Even more, other historians of Chartres suggest the School tried to change theology to mathematics (Baumgartner, de Bruyne, Weatherbee).<sup>21</sup>

Similar claims about the value of geometry for knowledge of God’s attributes and actions are found in Nicholas of Cusa, and, through him, in Renaissance theologians, architects, and scientists. Cusa wanted the precision of mathematics, not for itself, nor even as basis for natural science, but to ground and deepen the knowledge of God:

I claim that because the only way available to us of coming to the divine is through symbols, it follows we should be able to employ those of mathematics fittingly because of their incorruptible certitude. (*De Docta Ignorantia* i. 11.)

Yet even mathematics, which best mirrors the indestructible truth, yields only symbols of it. Cusa knew others before him took this approach. He marshalled in his support Pythagoras, Augustine, Boethius, and Anselm. They employed, variously, the figures of line, equilateral triangle, infinite circle, and infinite sphere. Cusa proposed to show that all of them correctly understood the Maximum (God), and that theirs is one single opinion. It is an

appeal to an unbroken tradition like the one we find in Weil.<sup>22</sup>

How, then, should we read Weil's mathematical animadversions on Trinity and Incarnation? More, I think, as meditations sketched in a spiritual diary than as preludes for philosophy or theology. They are the heart's desire rather than the mind's word, reflections in Plato's wisdom tradition, oriented to salvation. They mirror, as Weil wanted, "a transformation in the orientation of the soul, which we call detachment.. (which) has as its object the establishment of a true hierarchy among values."

Weil did not enjoy the advantage of a formal theological tradition, ecclesiastical or academic. Clement, Cyril, Augustine, Thierry, Cusa and Rahner worked in a vital, probing faith community. The community gave tradition and a controlling matrix for exploration, imagination, and theological dialog. Weil, for the most part, struggled alone, despite the presence of loving family and friends and the resources of a Latin theology and liturgy she knew but from afar. There is no indication that she studied Anselm, Augustine, Aquinas, or contemporary Catholic theologians. Weil read the Gospels in the 20th century, but not as a 20th century Christian inheriting the ecclesial consciousness won by the prayers and pain of those who went before her in faith.

Augustine came first to the Platonists, and then to the New Testament. He later reread the Platonists with New Testament eyes. Weil also came to the Platonists, but she did not live to a point where she could find something to transcend Platonism. Shortly before her death she read in a paper of Deodat Roche that Catharism could be taken as a Christian Pythagoreanism or Platonism. She wrote to him that

Nothing surpasses Plato in my eyes. Simple intellectual curiosity cannot supply contact with the thought of Pythagoras and Plato, for in this knowledge and adhesion are but a single act of the mind. I think it is the same for Catharism.<sup>23</sup>

Medieval Catharism, in her (confessedly) limited view, was the last vital European expression of the ancient religious tradition, best expressed in Plato, from which Christianity issued. Gnostics, Manichaeans, and Cathars alone escaped the corrupt imperial Roman influence and power lust to stay faithful to the tradition.

Weil's stand seems more the Christian Herme-

tism of Robert Fludd or the esoterism of Thomas Taylor, though again, there are no signs she actually came in contact with their books. Weil came to uncritical reading of Orphic Hymns, the school of Pythagoras, the text of Philolaus, as repositories of an ancient wisdom from a primal revelation. She worked to reconcile Christianity as she knew it with a pagan *Theologia Prisca* through numerology, mystical geometry, the microcosm-macrocosm, and Pythagorean musical intervals. Weil very much wanted to be in this Orphic-Pythagorean line whose global historical stream she surmised, even if, as she allowed, documentary evidence for it was inadequate. She wanted also to know Christ whom she met in the Gospels. She only began to discern Him in the Church, the community of faith, less clearly, it would appear, than she discerned circle and triangle, proportion and harmony as imperishable signs of God and his Logos-Word, the bond between pure spirit and fallen flesh.

Weil, however, reminds us of the unity of our experience: physical, intellectual, religious. There should not be an inconsistency in the believer's discovery of Trinitarian images in the experience of mathematics, any more than there is an inconsistency in understanding the transcendent intelligibility patterns in the physical world as incomplete without a foundation in the Divine Mind. We live, of necessity, in community; we know God, in part through the community.

The Christian explores the divine mysteries and explicates personal faith, knowledge and response, in and with the community of faith. Weil's arresting insights and, at times, disconcerting, partial grasp of New Testament witness attest the apparently unfinished journey of a sensitive, empathetic spirit who came from afar but only had time to stand at the perimeter of the community of Christian faith. Her own resources, the legacy of Homer, Sophocles, and Plato, let her read from a distance, imperfectly, the natural patterns, physical and mathematical, and the evangelium the community discerned with attention.

God's gracious, free revelation of His Mystery lightens these patterns. Where once as Greeks we longed for a path, now as Christians we recognize the Way and its markings. We read in the Church both Scripture and Science. There both speak of Trinity and God-created world.



## NOTES

1We will consider instances found in the following collections of Weil's essays and notes: *Waiting for God* (tr. Emma Craufurd), Putnam, N.Y., 1951 (Waiting); *Notebooks of Simone Weil* (tr. Arthur F. Wills) 2 vols., Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1956 (Notebooks); *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks* (tr. Elizabeth Geissbuhler), Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1957 (Intimations); *Seventy Letters* (tr. Richard Rees), Oxford University Press, London, 1965 (Letters); *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God* (tr. Richard Rees), Oxford University Press, London, 1968 (Science).

2*Letters*, p. 118 (#38).

3*Intimations*, p. 153.

4*Notebooks*, vol. II, p. 441.

5*Intimations*, p. 171, *Science*, p. 143.

6*Notebooks*, vol. II, p. 512.

7*Intimations*, p. 166, *Science*, p. 141.

8*Science*, p. 142-143.

9*Intimations*, p. 168.

10*Intimations*, p. 169.

11*Intimations*, p. 160.

12*Notebooks*, vol. II, p. 441.

13*Waiting*, p. 208, *Intimations*, p. 172.

14*Waiting*, p. 111, *Notebooks*, vol. II, p. 515.

15*Intimations*, p. 154-155, *Science*, p. 144.

16*Greek Myths and Christian Mystery* (tr. Brian Battershaw), Burns and Oates, London 1963, pp. xv-xvi.

17*Intimations*, p. 169.

18*Intimations*, p. 94.

19Latin text in N. Haring, "The Creation and Creator of the World according to Thierry of Chartres and Clarenbaldus of Arras," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et litteraire du moyen age*, XXII (1955) 194.

20For a discussion of Thierry's texts, see N.M. Haring, *Life and Works of Clarenbald of Arras* (Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto, 1965), p. 30 ff. W. Jansen and Haring attribute the text *Librum Hunc* to Thierry. A complete edition was given by Haring, who cites it as *Commentum*.

21A. Katzenellenbogen: *The Sculptural Programs of Chartres Cathedral* (Johns Hopkins, Baltimore, 1959), 18-21.

22See R. Wittkower: *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (Norton, New York, 1971) p. 27 ff, for Cusa's geometrical mysticism and references to its sources in the Orphic-Pythagorean tradition.

23*Letters*, p. 129-131. See also S. Petrement: *Simone Weil. A Life*. (English Translation. New York, Pantheon, 1976), p. 394-396.