

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI

A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE MYSTICAL-PROPHETIC THOUGHT OF SIMONE WEIL AND GUSTAVO
GUTIERREZ: REFLECTIONS ON THE MYSTERY AND HIDDENNESS OF GOD

VOLUME ONE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

EDWARD ALEXANDER NAVA

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

JUNE 1997

UMI Number: 9729851

**Copyright 1997 by
Nava, Edward Alexander**

All rights reserved.

**UMI Microform 9729851
Copyright 1997, by UMI Company. All rights reserved.**

**This microform edition is protected against unauthorized
copying under Title 17, United States Code.**

UMI
300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

TABLE OF CONTENTS

VOLUME ONE

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
CHAPTER	
I. MYSTICISM AND PROPHECY IN CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT	1
A Philosophical and Theological Interpretation of Mysticism and Prophecy: Manifestation and Proclamation.....	3
Historical-Contextual Interpretations.....	11
Mysticism.....	11
Prophecy.....	29
II. MYSTICISM, MARXISM, AND WORK IN SIMONE WEIL	49
Spirituality and Mysticism in Simone Weil.....	52
The Accessibility of Mysticism.....	72
Work as Limit of and Possibility for Mysticism.....	78
Work as Limit of Mysticism.....	81
Work as Possibility for Mysticism.....	89
The Mysticism of Work.....	97
III. THE MYSTICAL VISION OF SIMONE WEIL	104
A Philosophical Interpretation of Idol and Icon.....	109
The Metaphors 'Darkness' and 'Void' in Christianity.....	112
Void, Dark Night, and Detachment.....	115
The Voiding of Sensual and Material Idols.....	117
The Voiding of Experiential and Conceptual/Imaginative Idols.....	119
Void and the Hiddenness of God.....	128
Decreation.....	138
Attention, Contemplation, and Love.....	145
Intellectual Attention.....	151
Aesthetical Attention.....	157
Ethical-Political Attention.....	162
Loving Attention and Divine Mystery.....	164
Mysticism as Reaction to the Consciousness of God.....	168

IV.	MYSTICISM AND LOVE IN THE THEOLOGY OF GUTIERREZ.....	174
	Traditional Elements of Spirituality in Gutierrez.....	176
	Challenging the Split between Spirituality and Theology.....	176
	The Moment of Silence in Theology.....	182
	The Mystery of God.....	185
	Love and Mysticism.....	189
	Novel Elements of Spirituality in Gutierrez.....	193
	History and the Eruption of the Poor.....	195
	The Interruption of Spirituality by Suffering.....	200
	Premature Death as Limit of Spirituality.....	204
	The Deconstruction of Idols as a Condition for Mysticism.....	208
	Freedom and Justice as Soil for Spirituality.....	212
	Memory and Cultural Traditions as Soil for Spirituality.....	215
	The Spirituality of Work.....	219

VOLUME TWO

V.	THE PROPHETIC-TRAGIC THOUGHT OF SIMONE WEIL: REFLECTIONS ON THE HIDDEN GOD.....	223
	The Relationship of Prophecy and Tragedy.....	228
	Prophecy.....	228
	Tragedy.....	234
	Prophetic-Tragic Thought.....	239
	The Hiddenness of God in Simone Weil.....	240
	The Hiddenness of God 1.....	246
	The Hiddenness of God 2.....	254
	Reconciliation of Hiddenness 1 and 2: The Prophetic-Tragic Thought of Weil.....	266
	Justice and Love Without a Why: Ethics and the Tragic Vision.....	272

VI.	PROPHECY AND TRAGEDY IN THE THOUGHT OF GUTIERREZ: REFLECTIONS ON THE HIDDEN GOD.....	278
	The Question of God and the Discipline of Religion.....	280
	The Hiddenness of God in Gutierrez.....	287
	The Hiddenness of God 1.....	290
	The Hiddenness of God 2.....	302
	Reconciliation and Hope.....	323
VII.	THE MYSTICAL-PROPHETIC THOUGHT OF WEIL AND GUTIERREZ: REFLECTIONS ON THE MYSTERY AND HIDDENNESS OF GOD.....	326
	Points of Contact in Weil and Gutierrez.....	327
	Prophecy and the Hiddenness of God.....	331
	Mysticism and the Mystery of God.....	338
	Points of Divergence in Weil and Gutierrez.....	343
	Mysticism and the Contribution of Weil.....	344
	Prophecy and the Contribution of Gutierrez.....	349
	Conclusions.....	353
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	356

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Simone Weil

FLNB	<i>First and Last Notebooks</i>
FW	<i>Formative Writings</i>
GG	<i>Gravity and Grace</i>
ICAG	<i>Intimations of Christianity Among the Greeks</i>
LP	<i>Lectures on Philosophy</i>
LTP	<i>Letter to a Priest</i>
NFR	<i>The Need For Roots</i>
NB	<i>The Notebooks of Simone Weil</i>
SNLG	<i>On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God</i>
OL	<i>Oppression and Liberty</i>
SE	<i>Selected Essays</i>
SL	<i>Seventy Letters</i>
MA	<i>Simone Weil: An Anthology, edited by Sian Miles</i>
WFG	<i>Waiting For God</i>

Works by Gustavo Gutierrez

ELC	<i>Entre Las Calandrias</i>
GL	<i>The God of Life</i>
LC	<i>Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ</i>
MIC	<i>Mysticism and Institutional Crisis</i>
OJ	<i>On Job</i>
PPH	<i>The Power of the Poor in History</i>
STH	<i>Sobre El Trabajo Humano</i>
TL	<i>A Theology of Liberation</i>
TSMYF	<i>The Truth Shall Make You Free</i>
WDOW	<i>We Drink From Our Own Wells</i>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The task of acknowledging the individuals who have contributed to the completion of my Ph.D. is a deeply difficult undertaking. From family and relatives to professors and friends, the list is long to whom I feel indebted. I feel humbled by a recognition of the crucial contributions of others to the contours of my ideas and perspectives. First and foremost, I am indebted to my family for nurturing in me a passionate thirst for knowledge. My parents, Alicia and Eduardo, stimulated in my *hermanos* and me a love of learning. The humor and love of my brother and sister, Andrew and Melinda, also provided me with much support. I also have been blessed with a friendship that is rare and exceptional in the person of Michael Ferguson. Finally, my fiance Siovhan Sheridan has provided me with indispensable spiritual and emotional support and, moreover, with intellectual companionship.

On a more intellectual note, Professors Robert Burns, O.P. and Heiko A. Oberman were pivotal influences in my life as an undergraduate student at the University of Arizona. Their gifts as both teachers and scholars played a crucial role in provoking in me a love of theological reflection and, thereby, causing me to re-direct the course of my studies and career from pre-med to the humanities and religion. At the University of Chicago, I have been blessed to work with an extraordinary thinker, teacher, and friend: David Tracy. His broad and creative theological vision has been the single, most important intellectual influence in my life. His ideas fill the pages of this thesis even when unacknowledged in the text. In fact, this thesis is not only on the thought of Simone Weil and Gustavo Gutierrez, but also on the theology of David Tracy.

CHAPTER ONE

MYSTICISM AND PROPHECY IN CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT

Central to this dissertation is the suggestion that dialogue between the mystical and prophetic trajectories of the Christian tradition should prevail over any binary opposition. I have found the reflections of Simone Weil and Gustavo Gutierrez provocative and extraordinary in their creative ability to engage both the mystical and prophetic traditions. I contend that both Weil and Gutierrez relate these religious elements of mysticism and prophecy in a manner that reveals an exceptional attention to the non-persons of history and that such a prophetic position is inspired by a mystical way of life in the face of Divine mystery. As this dissertation hopes to show, both Weil and Gutierrez are suspicious of forms of mysticism that ignore or minimize the harsh reality of suffering and violence in history and society; conversely, they reveal a serious mistrust of prophetic traditions which deny the contributions of mystical interpretations, practices, and ways of speaking to and about the Divine mystery. More specifically in relation to the question of God, they ratify both expressions of God's transcendence and mystery in the mystical tradition, on the one hand, and God's hiddenness in the prophetic and tragic traditions, on the other.

Insofar as Weil and Gutierrez embody distinct perspectives and interpretations, attention to important differences in their thought cannot be ignored. In regards to mysticism, I am arguing that Simone Weil contributes a more intense and developed understanding than that of Gutierrez. While this does not suggest that mysticism is absent in Gutierrez, I believe that Weil incorporates aspects of mysticism in a manner that is exceptional and original. This presence of mysticism in her life and thought is due, in large part, to her profound and penetrating knowledge of Plato and the Platonic tradition, on the one hand, and to her own mystical encounters with God and Christ, on the other. The intensity and excess of mysticism in her life endows this young woman (she died at the age of 34) with an aura of fascination and mystery. Concerning the prophetic tradition, on the other hand, we will see that Gutierrez's interpretation and appropriation of the prophetic Israelite tradition provides an important corrective and critique of Weil's tendentious and close-minded dismissal of much of the Hebrew bible. Gutierrez's reading of Exodus, the prophets, the Psalms, and especially Job is important in retrieving the Jewish roots of the west. As with the presence of mysticism in Gutierrez, however, we should not conclude by this argument that the prophetic element is absent in Weil. In fact, Weil adds her own contribution to the prophetic tradition by her creative interpretation of Greek tragedy vis-a-vis the Christian passion narratives. In these regards, this thesis contends that bringing these thinkers into dialogue can contribute a more developed and comprehensive mystical-prophetic formulation than that of either Weil or Gutierrez alone.

Before turning to examine the thought of Weil and Gutierrez in greater detail, I

hope in this chapter to clarify and develop the meaning of both 'mysticism' and 'prophecy'. The first part of this chapter will examine mysticism and prophecy on philosophical and theological grounds, specifically by appropriating the models of manifestation and proclamation worked out by David Tracy. The second part of the chapter will examine these two forms of religion from a more historical-contextual approach.

A Philosophical and Theological Interpretation of Mysticism and Prophecy: Manifestation and Proclamation

At the outset it deserves mention that the models of manifestation and proclamation are ideal types and, as such, have an interpretive, illuminating power, but also have limitations when examining a particular, historical religious expression.¹ Nevertheless, I am persuaded that the model of manifestation can enrich our understanding of the mystical-priestly-metaphysical, meditative-aesthetical elements of religion, on the one hand, and that the model of proclamation can enrich our understanding of the prophetic-historical-apocalyptic-ethical elements of religion, on the other. In *The Analogical Imagination*, David Tracy contends that our options are truly impoverished if we have to choose only one of the above trajectories to interpret the complexity and pluralism of both Christianity and human experience.² For Tracy, religion

¹Gustavo Gutierrez makes the point that his interpretation of 'contemplative' and 'prophetic' languages are not mutually exclusive, but rather at times they intermingle and blend (OJ 16).

²"Is there not a wisdom implicit in the complexity of a symbol system which resonates with the complexity of human experience itself to demand both manifestation and proclamation?" See David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991) 215. In *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-religious Dialogue* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1990) 101, Tracy notes

as manifestation signifies the sense of radical participation in nature and the divine reality, while religion as proclamation interrupts any such belonging by the shattering Otherness of God revealed in history, not nature. In the former instance, God is depicted as immanent in the cosmos and in the latter, God is transcendent, hidden.

The form of God's self-disclosure in the tradition of **manifestation** occurs primarily through myth, ritual, meditation, symbol, image and icon. Our participation in the whole of nature is disclosed to us through an encounter with such religious forms. Through such participation a feeling of harmony, even union, with God and cosmos may occur. In exceptional moments, an epiphany of truth, beauty, and love strikes us, possesses us and transports us beyond the confines of ordinary time and place. Myth and ritual manifest the power of the sacred by revealing the banality of ordinary time and space and the precious, eternal character of sacred time and space. It is the paradigmatic and timeless moments of religious truth and beauty which are most real, not the face of history.³ In this framework, religion is oriented to cosmos and aesthetics not history and

the contemporary interest in exploring the mystical and prophetic elements of religion: in the prophetic Jewish tradition, the interest in the mystical and archaic occasioned by the work of Scholem; the re-thinking of the importance of mysticism and popular religion by liberation theologians; the interest in the spirituals and blues by some African-American theologians; the fascination with the archaic goddess and Wisdom Sophia traditions by feminist theologians. On the other side, many mystical-oriented traditions have begun to incorporate a more ethical-political element into their traditions, as with the influence of Gandhi on Hindu thought or the reflections of Buddhists on the relationship between compassion and social justice.

³Tracy detects this aspect of religion as manifestation in the work of Mircea Eliade. For Tracy, Eliade's work signals the importance of non-verbal religious expressions; that is, religious expressions through hierophanies, theophanies, archetypes, rituals, and myths. In Eliade's Orthodox sensibility, it is cosmos and aesthetics which dominate and not history and ethics. Indeed, history for Eliade is the realm of the profane. See Tracy's *The Analogical Imagination*, op.cit., 205-08. In *The Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1943) T.S. Eliot expresses this aspect of religion in the following words of the still point: "At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless; Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is, But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity. Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards, Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point, there would be no dance, and there is only the dance. I can only say, *there* we have been: but I cannot say where. And I

ethics.⁴ Religious expressions occur through the hierophanies and theophanies of a sacred ritual, place, image, or ritual (e.g., mountain, tree, Church, icon, festival, etc.). In monotheistic traditions of manifestation, God is seen as filling and imbuing all of created reality with His/Her presence. Nature becomes a ladder not an obstacle to God (as in the thought of Saint Francis and his disciple Saint Bonaventure). The faculty of vision is trusted as a potential pathway which guides us from seeing God in the beauty of creation and, at certain graced moments, elevates us to a more mystical vision of God in contemplation.

The model of manifestation is exemplified by the tradition of Catholic Christianity, in particular. In this tradition, the gift of God's grace is interpreted as transforming not denying or negating the realm of human experience, including culture, human reason (*logos*), nature, human anthropology, and human love. Indeed, for Catholic Christianity, inherent to reason, culture, and love is the longing of the human spirit for God. A desire and yearning manifests itself even in nature itself as creation groans to return to its original state (where 'the beginning is the end'). There is a felt relationship and sense of order and harmony between God's grace and human experience in this interpretation of reality. God's grace is always, already present in reality; all of reality is graced. To be sure, in this understanding of Christianity, God's grace comes in an unsurpassed

cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time" (pp.15-16).

⁴Fyodor Dostoyevsky exemplifies this element of manifestation through his profound Russian Orthodox sensibility. One of his character, Prince Myshkin, in The Idiot is depicted as a kind of mystic. Unlike the effects of a drug, Dostoyevsky describes the religious experiences of the Prince as heightened states of self-awareness and awareness of ultimate reality. A feeling of beauty, wholeness, and ecstatic joy dominates the Prince at these moments. It is then, the Prince says, that he understood the words 'there shall be time no longer'. The Idiot tran. Henry and Olga Carlisle (New York: Penguin Books, 1969) 245-46.

manner through the Logos made visible, Jesus Christ. The eternal Logos is incarnate, however, both through visible sacrament (in Jesus of Nazareth and Church) and through the body of creation (the Logos is 'that through which all was made'--John 1:1-3). The Logos is the always, already present God (realized eschatology) that pervades the created order, including nature and human reason, and evokes wonder and awe at the sheer beauty, proportionality, and intelligibility of all creation. This interpretation of the human condition gives rise to a fundamental trust in the worthwhileness of human existence: "to trust in the radical immanence of God in all reality, to trust in reason and its many paths, to trust in the profound *eros* in every self in all its quests for truth, for goodness, for beauty, for beatitude."⁵

More specifically related to Christian mysticism, Tracy explains that when the event of manifestation becomes a more intense "mediated immediacy" through Jesus Christ, we can speak of Christian mysticism in a more precise manner.⁶ Here the sense of God's immanence in the cosmos and in the figure of the incarnate Logos becomes an erupting force. In many mystics this leads to the cataphatic affirmation of all reality and the validation of all religious significations which represent God in the cosmos (images, symbols, rituals, etc.). With the apophatic mystics, this cataphatic affirmation is consequently negated and silenced to make evident the finitude of all human images,

⁵The Analogical Imagination, op.cit., 432.

⁶ibid. 385.

concepts, symbols, words.⁷ As we will see later in this chapter, the work of Bernard McGinn and others further develop and enrich our understanding of mysticism.⁸

With religion as **proclamation**, on the other hand, the Word of God interrupts participation and discloses our non-identity, finitude, and estrangement from the cosmos and the divine reality.⁹ The harmony that is felt in the tradition of manifestation is looked upon with suspicion and distrust as potentially masking idolatry. Instead, dialectical conflict between *grace/faith and* culture, reason, nature, and human anthropology is most striking. For Luther, reason is a whore and philosophy foolishness; for Kierkegaard and Barth, culture is potentially demonic (i.e., Nazism for Barth); for Calvin, nature without Christ leads to the worship of unknown gods; in the thought of Augustine, self-esteem often masks pride and narcissism. In the words of Tracy: "This prophetic word comes also as stark proclamation, as kerygma, to disconfirm any complacency in participation, to shatter any illusions that this culture, this priesthood, this land, this ritual is enough, to defamiliarize us with ourselves and with nature, to decode our encoded myths, to inflict its passionate negations upon all our pretensions, to suspect even our nostalgic longings for sacred cosmos, to expose all idols of the self as projections of ourselves and our mad ambitions, to expose all culture as contingent, even arbitrary, all philosophical wisdom

⁷Mystical thinkers such as Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor maintain the dialectical tension between God's immanence and transcendence in an exceptional manner. With these thinkers the cataphatic affirmation of reality validates the importance of liturgy, image, and Church in their theology, while the apophatic element negates the literalization of such metaphors and symbols for understanding the darkness of God. For Pseudo-Dionysius see Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987). For Maximus the Confessor see The Church, the Liturgy and the Soul of Man trans. Dom Julian Stead (Massachusetts: St. Bede's Publications, 1982).

⁸Also see chapter two for a discussion of the work of Bernard McGinn on mysticism.

⁹The Analogical Imagination, op.cit., 208.

as foolishness..."¹⁰ This proclamation erupts as a deconstructive hammer against a facile, liberal optimism about the human condition, a simplistic belief in historical continuity and evolution, or an easy harmony between Christianity and culture, nature, reason.

For Jews, Christians, and Muslims the Word is the proclamation of a wholly Other God who is manifested in and through the events of concrete history. The Word of God comes as disruptive *kerygma* revealed in history, not primarily as eternal *logos*. The Word of this Other comes to the prophet as a disturbing crisis which disseminates the ego of the individual recipient; the prophet is no longer his or her own person.¹¹ Rather, the prophet speaks on behalf of, and in response to, both the Otherness of God and the otherness of those individuals, communities, and histories marginalized and scorned by the powerful and wealthy.¹² It is not surprising that Tracy interprets liberation and political theology as incorporating this tradition of proclamation. Unlike some classic Protestant interpretations of this heritage (sometimes rather individualistic and spiritualized), however, liberation and political theologies insist on the primacy of historical action in the world and on preserving the subversive and liberating memories of the Christian tradition. In this case, it is communal and global suffering which interrupts order, harmony, reason. "Not wonder, not giftedness, not personal justification, not reconciliation, is the foremost clue to the contemporary situation: but the stark, system-enforced suffering of individuals and peoples trapped in concrete situations of

¹⁰ibid, 209.

¹¹Dialogue with the Other, op.cit., 21.

¹²In terms of the Christian notion of the self, Tracy explains that the prophetic tradition affirms belief in an agent with sufficient freedom to be responsible to God and others (ibid, 115).

systemic oppression."¹³ Against this situation of communal suffering and oppression, the liberation theologians appeal to the liberating memories of Exodus and the prophets, the Kingdom of God proclaimed to the poor and outcasts by Jesus, and the historical reality of Christ crucified.

In the Christian tradition, the Word of God is disclosed in the historical figure of Jesus Christ. This Jesus comes not with power, glory, and wealth, but rather as one who is un-noticed and hidden. As with the 'Suffering Servant' of Isaiah, Jesus is a man scorned and rejected by all, a man of suffering. There is nothing in his appearance that would attract us or lead us to adore him. He keeps company with the poor and outcasts of society. In the interpretation of St. Paul, the Word of God emptied himself and took the form of a servant. Jesus the servant and Christ crucified is a scandal to all worldly values and human achievements. If we are to locate God's presence, then, we should look to the underside of history; it is in the faces of the subjugated, crucified peoples that the Suffering Servant is to be found. In this interpretation of Christianity, the reality of conflict, suffering, and cross in human existence makes evident the 'not/yet' character of eschatology. God is still the One who is to come, not as the culmination of evolution, to be sure, but in the form of an eschatological, even apocalyptic judgment.¹⁴ God's naked majesty and wrath communicates to us the hiddenness of the divine reality for whom we long, but who is still hidden from history.

¹³The Analogical Imagination, op.cit., 394.

¹⁴In Dialogue with the Other, op.cit., Tracy contends that apocalypticism should be seen with the tradition of proclamation as a moment of severe crisis and disaster, as a moment when prophecy fails. The apocalyptic reading of history reveals only discontinuity, rupture, fissures, gaps. At the same time that history is seen as terrifying, God is seen as threatening (pp.117,121).

The reading of religion as manifestation and proclamation by David Tracy, I am persuaded, can illuminate our understanding of mysticism and prophecy, respectively. Many of these issues discussed above are central to the work of Simone Weil and Gustavo Gutierrez. We will see how the following words of Tracy are so close to the thought of Gutierrez and Weil: "Without the prophetic core, the struggle for justice and freedom in the historical-political world can too soon be lost in mere privacy. Without the mystical insistence on love, the spiritual power of the righteous struggle for justice is always in danger of lapsing into mere self-righteousness and spiritual exhaustion."¹⁵ Before turning to the work of Weil and Gutierrez, however, it is important to consider 'mysticism' and 'prophecy' from a historical-contextual angle.

This historical-contextual approach to the study of mysticism and prophecy should not be seen as mutually exclusive of a philosophical or theological reading of these religious forms. The strength of the following historical-contextual approach (McGinn on mysticism, Blenkinsopp and Heschel on prophecy), however, lies in its ability to isolate the unique and specific identities of the mystical and prophetic traditions.

¹⁵ibid. 118.

Historical-Contextual Interpretations of Mysticism and Prophecy

*Mysticism*¹⁶

Before considering the meaning of Christian mysticism, a brief discussion of philosophical studies on mysticism is in order. Studies on the character of Christian mysticism, especially the work of Bernard McGinn and Louis Dupre, will follow upon this philosophical discussion. This section will then conclude with a reading of the apophatic element in mysticism, especially by the work of Denys Turner and Michael Sells, and an interpretation by Michel de Certeau that highlights the transgressive and dissident character of Christian mystics.

Louis Dupre is correct to begin his examination of the term mysticism with the caveat that there is no definition sufficiently comprehensive to include the diversity of interpretations and experiences in the world religions that have been described as 'mystical'.¹⁷ The assumption that one could isolate a universal, common core experience that is at the heart of all mysticism (across time and place) leads to the confidence in a

¹⁶A study of the origins and etymology of 'mysticism', from Plato and the Greek mystery religions to Neo-Platonism, gnosticism, and the Christian thinkers, is a project that is extremely important, but beyond the scope of this thesis. While it is clear that the Platonic tradition (including elements of gnosticism) deeply influenced the development of Christian mysticism, it is less clear what part the Greek mystery religions played. In the west, the word *muein* ("to remain silent") was related to the Greek mystery cults and referred to the secrecy of the initiation rites. McGinn suggests that whatever the role these mystery cults had in the development of Christian mysticism, "it was largely one mediated through the philosophical appropriation of the myths of the mystery cults." The term *mustikos* was also used by some neo-Platonists to signify an intuitive vision of mystery at the peak of contemplation, perhaps something adopted from the mystery religions. In the Christian tradition, the adjective *mustikos* was employed in relation to the spiritual meaning behind the letter in biblical exegesis. See Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991) 42. The term 'mysticism', as a noun (in French 'la mystique'), only emerged in the early modern period (late 16th to 17th centuries). In the Christian tradition, the adjectival form, mystical, was used in reference to the Scriptures, the body of Christ, or in relation to theology. With the modern world, 'mysticism' became more centered around the presence of particular, extraordinary states or experiences.

¹⁷See Dupre's essay "Mysticism" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Volume 10, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987).

cross-cultural and cross-religious definition. In this perspective, all apparent differences of mystical interpretations and experiences are only due to the religious and doctrinal traditions of the mystic, not to the experiences themselves. The interpretations of the experience may vary, but since such interpretations are subsequent to the core experience, they do not affect the experience itself. Against this reading of mysticism (and religion), many contemporary scholars highlight the complex relations between experience and understanding. From the classic epistemological insights of Kant we know that 'experience' is not a pure, unmediated sensation; rather experience is the product of the *a priori* cognitive ordering of reality.¹⁸ As Dupre puts it: "Experience itself is distinctly cognitive and intentionally unique."¹⁹ In the hermeneutical tradition, furthermore, it is insisted that there is no pure experience that is not mediated and shaped by religious, cultural, linguistic, socio-economic and political traditions. All experience and understanding is inextricably linked with interpretation. Far from merely being subsequent to experience, then, interpretation shapes and determines experience.

The implications of this perspective for the study of mysticism are profound. Steven Katz contends that an awareness of the way in which interpretation shapes and mediates experience should lead to a greater attention to the uniqueness and historical

¹⁸In his Critique of Pure Reason Kant states the meaning of *a priori* knowledge: While all knowledge begins with experience, he says, "it by no means follows that all arises out of experience. For, on the contrary, it is quite possible that our empirical knowledge is a compound of that which we receive through impressions, and that which the faculty of cognition supplies from itself (sensuous impressions giving merely the *occasion*)..." See Philosophical Writings ed. and trans. Ernst Behler (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1986) 21-22. In her interpretation of perception, Simone Weil accepts this view of Kant (LP 42-43, 46-47, 112-13, 183). Her reflections on language, however, bring her closer to the hermeneutical tradition (LP 64-76).

¹⁹Louis Dupre, "Mysticism," op.cit., 246.

specificity of mysticism in particular religious traditions. If the mystic's experiences are mediated by various interpretations of reality (or modes-of-being-in-the-world), then a study of the actual religious and cultural beliefs, doctrines, rituals, and practices must be at the heart of the study of mysticism. In reference to Jewish mysticism, he avers that "the entire life of the Jewish mystic is permeated from childhood up by images, concepts, symbols, ideologies, values, and ritual behavior which there is not reason to believe he leaves behind in his experience."²⁰ An adequate study of Jewish mysticism, in this light, must involve a study of the Jewish religion; a study of Buddhist mysticism must involve a study of Buddhism, etc...²¹ In short, while a comparative study of mysticism is by no means inappropriate (a search for the family resemblances among the religious traditions²²), the study of mysticism should consider mysticism as an element within concrete religious traditions.

²⁰Steven Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism" in Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis ed. Steven Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 33.

²¹While beyond the scope of this chapter and thesis, a very interesting article on the nature of Buddhist mysticism appears in the Katz volume Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis, op.cit.. In his essay, "Mysticism and Meditation," Robert Gimello contends that Buddhist mystical experiences are "deliberately contrived exemplifications of Buddhist doctrine" (p.193). The goal of Buddhist meditation is, in this tradition, discernment and not the attainment of any extraordinary states or experiences. In fact, meditative discernment is a critical and skeptical form of discrimination which employs Buddhist concepts and doctrines (i.e., emptiness, impermanence, no-self, dependent origination) to control and undermine both the delusory potential of extraordinary experiences, on the one hand, and the mind's tendency to literalize or ontologize the concepts and doctrines (used for medicinal, not metaphysical purposes), on the other. As an example, Gimello explains that in the (polemical) position of Mahayana Buddhism, it is the 'Hinayana' Buddhist who mistakes a trance-like stupor for nirvana. On the contrary, the truly enlightened one (bodhisattva) is the one who is located enlightenment not in the attainment of any particular states, but rather in a this-worldly life of compassionate activity (p.190-92).

²²The classic work of William James, for example, claims that the following four qualities define a mystical state of consciousness across the religions: 1)Ineffability: The experience or content of experience defies expression; 2)Noetic quality: mystical states impart real knowledge and insight into reality via illuminations, revelations, etc...; 3)Transience: it is an impermanent state; 4)Passivity: even when certain voluntary practices and exercises are necessary, mystical states happen to one. they possess the recipient as if he or she were grasped by a higher power. See The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York: Penguin Books. 1982) 380-81.

The work of Bernard McGinn is exemplary and creative in this approach to the study of mysticism. While he is insistent on the importance of theological and anthropological interpretations of mysticism and spirituality, a historical-contextual interpretation is at the heart of his method. On the meaning of spirituality vis-a-vis a historical-contextual approach, he writes: "I refer to this as the historical-contextual approach because it emphasizes spirituality as an experience rooted in a particular community's history rather than as a dimension of human existence as such (not that it excludes this)."²³ The study of mysticism and spirituality should be wary of defining these terms in a universal manner lest we neglect the rich diversity and plurality of these religious expressions.

McGinn's very helpful suggestion is that mysticism should be studied under the following three headings: "mysticism as a part or element of religion; mysticism as a process or way of life; and mysticism as an attempt to express a direct consciousness of the presence of God."²⁴ In accord with the scholars mentioned hitherto, McGinn contends that mystical theory precedes and guides the mystic's entire way of life; it is not subsequent or incidental to mystical experiences. Along these lines, the emphasis on mystical experiences is potentially dangerous in that it may neglect attention to mystical theory and doctrine. In the hopes of isolating a common core experience, such an emphasis overlooks the specific identity of mysticism in concrete religious traditions.

²³Bernard McGinn, "The Letter and the Spirit: Spirituality as an Academic Discipline," in *Christian Spirituality Bulletin: Journal of the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality* (Volume 1, Number 2, Fall 1993) 6.

²⁴Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991) xv-xvi.

The emphasis on experience as defining of mysticism, moreover, often leads to an emphasis on first-person, autobiographical accounts of mysticism. As McGinn notes, such autobiographical accounts are rare in the first millennium of Christian mysticism.²⁵ With the absence of such descriptions, we are not in the position to know with certainty if a person has been privileged with particular extraordinary experiences. Indeed, even if this knowledge was possible, it would not solve our task of trying to understand mystical theology. The neglect of the written expressions of mystical theology is often the result of this concern with 'experience'. "Until recent years," McGinn writes, "over concentration on the highly ambiguous notion of mystical experience has blocked careful analysis of the special hermeneutics of mystical texts, which have usually been treated without attention to genre, audience, structure, and even the simplest procedures for elucidating study of the texts."²⁶ This focus on experience has led to a neglect of theology as a whole in the Christian mystics; mystical experience has become divorced from theology.²⁷

With the suggestion that mysticism is a part or element of religion and that it is a process or way of life, McGinn offers a definition of one particular tradition of mysticism, namely, Christian mysticism: "Thus we can say that the mystical element in

²⁵ibid, xiv-xv. "Theologically speaking, the issue is not, Was this person really a mystic because he or she claims to have had the kind of experience I define as mystical? but, What is the significance of her or his writings, autobiographically mystical or not, in the history of Christian mysticism?"

²⁶ibid, xiv.

²⁷Andrew Louth in his work The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition, op.cit., explains that in the Christian tradition, mystical theology and dogmatic theology were inextricably linked. The former provides the context for "direct apprehensions of of the God who has revealed himself in Christ and dwells within us through the Holy Spirit; while dogmatic theology attempts to incarnate those apprehensions in objectively precise terms..." (p.xi).

Christianity is that part of its belief and practices that concerns the preparation for, consciousness of, and reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God."²⁸ The reference to the stages 'preparing for' and 'following from' the consciousness of the direct presence of God is important for stressing that Christian mysticism is an entire way of interpreting, believing, acting, and living. It is a process and not merely a transient experience. Spiritual training and exercises, as methods for preparing for God-consciousness, on the one hand, and spiritual parenthood as the fruit of this new consciousness, on the other, are as much a part of mysticism as any exceptional experiences. The presence of extraordinary experiences, such as visions, locutions, levitation, rapture, ecstasy, do play a role in Christian mysticism, but they are not constitutive of mysticism *per se*. McGinn's emphasis on an immediate or direct *consciousness* of God, in this sense, is helpful to displace the dominant emphasis on experience.

Louis Dupre's interpretation of mysticism concurs with McGinn's perspective. For Dupre, the mystic's new *awareness* of reality, God, and self is at the heart of mystical theology. Instead of focusing on extraordinary experiences, the mystics themselves "try to articulate an awareness of God's presence in the soul in an established language."²⁹ Thus, Dupre distinguishes between the new awareness or unified vision of reality "from those ecstatic experiences that occasionally accompany it, but by no means constitute its

²⁸The Foundation of Mysticism, op.cit., xvii.

²⁹Louis Dupre, "Unio Mystica: The State and the Experience" in Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam ed. Moshe Idel and Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1996) 8.

essence."³⁰ He explains that this state of union engenders a new vision of reality, a wholly new awareness or consciousness of ultimate reality. This new consciousness, he continues, is one of being-with rather than reflecting-upon ultimate reality. Fundamentally, this state brings about a conversion from self-consciousness to God-consciousness. This new way of life has a cognitive quality to it, then; an affective union with God in love does not preclude an intellectual vision. Dupre mentions that for Theresa of Avila, for instance, the highest 'mansion', the seventh, of her *The Interior Castle* commences with an intellectual intuition and comprehensive insight into the source and coherence of all reality.³¹ This state is conceived as both an affective and cognitive union with God that is consummated in spiritual marriage. Such a spiritual marriage is less a transient experience, contends Dupre, than an "uninterrupted awareness of God's presence."³²

In addition to this emphasis on mystical awareness or consciousness of God (instead of extraordinary experiences), Dupre also agrees with McGinn that mysticism is a *process* in the western religious traditions. We are again misled if we focus on the (transient) moment of union with God in lieu of the stages preceding and following upon the state of union. The motif of journey, Dupre contends, is a helpful metaphor for emphasizing the importance of mysticism as a process or entire way of life. In his

³⁰ibid, 10.

³¹ibid, 12. See Theresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle* trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) 172-194. Theresa states that in this final 'mansion' the faculty of the intellect and will are not lost, but amazed (p.186).

³²ibid, 11.

Twenty-Seventh Homily on Numbers, Origen, for example, compares the spiritual life to Israel's exodus from Egypt. First, the soul withdraws from the pagan idols of vice and then crosses the Red Sea in a baptism of conversion. In the journey through the desert the soul will have to withstand temptation and false illusions in order to be fully purged and illuminated, thus making union with God possible.³³ For Christian mystics, then, spiritual union with God happens via a process of liberation from bondage and through a life-long commitment. The permanence of commitment to this marriage with God leads to spiritual parenthood, to the giving birth of others. In the Christian tradition, the importance of *praxis* and charity emerges as a crucial element here. The contemplative ascent to God is never sufficient without an imitation of the descent of Christ into lowly human form. In the words of Richard of St. Victor: "He who ascends to this degree of charity is truly in the state of love that can say: 'I am made all things to all men that I might save all'."³⁴ This condition of spiritual marriage is one of a fecundity in the world, of a sharing of the "life-giving fruitfulness of the divine nature" (Ruusbroec).³⁵

Andrew Louth's interpretation of Christian mysticism agrees with this importance of charity in the mystical life. He pinpoints the uniqueness of Christian mysticism, in distinction from Neo-Platonism, in the location of the virtues as the fruit and not merely as the means of the mystical life. Rather than being merely purificatory for the ascent

³³See Louis Dupre "Mysticism," op.cit., 252.

³⁴Louis Dupre, "*Unio Mystica: The State and the Experience*," op.cit., 14. See Richard of St. Victor in The Four Degrees of Passionate Love in Richard of St. Victor: Selected Writings on Contemplation, ed. and trans. Clare Kirchberger (London, 1957) 232.

³⁵ibid. 17.

of the soul, in Christian mysticism moral virtues are the fruits of the Spirit, the evidences of the Christ's presence. He quotes Gregory of Nyssa as an example of this vision of 'contemplation rooted in action': "You are the master of your prayer if abundance does not come from another's property, and is not the result of another's tears; if no one is hungry or distressed because you are fully satisfied. For the bread of God is above all the fruit of justice, the ear of the corn of peace, pure and without any admixture of the seed of tares."³⁶ This understanding of Christian mysticism is clear in highlighting the entire way of life of the mystic, both prior to and following upon an encounter with the presence of God.

To return to McGinn's understanding of mysticism, we must not overlook his choice of the term *presence* of God. While the idea of union with God (often through the reading of the *Song of Songs*) is a central metaphor in the Christian mystical tradition, it is not the only way to articulate the immediate or direct presence of God. In this sense, the diversity of Christian expressions is taken into account by McGinn: not only union, but contemplation and vision of God, deification, ecstasy and rapture, the birth of the Word in the soul, or radical obedience to the Divine will, have all been given expression in the Christian tradition. Finally, the emphasis on the *immediate or direct* consciousness of God recalls another important point to be made. Since I have emphasized that

³⁶Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981) 198-99. Louth also mentions other important differences between Platonic and Christian mysticism: 1. God is more personal in the Christian tradition and hence any assistance by the Divine in the mystical life is seen as a personal and unmerited gift; 2. The soul is created out of nothingness in the Christian tradition and is thus not innately divine as in the Platonic tradition; 3. The Church is a public community open to all people, not just to an educated, intellectual elite. Mysticism, in this case, is not merely a private affair, but an aspect of the entire Christian life within the traditions, beliefs, and practices of the Church.

interpretation shapes and mediates experience, it is important to note that, for the western religious traditions at least, experience is also something that is given; that is, it occurs and happens under the power and initiative of God. In this sense, a claim to immediacy with God is in a dialectical relationship with the mediated character of mysticism. This sense of immediacy with God may occur (though certainly not always) outside of the ordinary avenues of Church, prayer, sacraments, images, etc... It may happen to one in a manner that is pure gift, epiphany. Such an event will, no doubt, challenge the more standard avenues for encountering God and, at times, reveal the standard avenues as being trite and superficial.

McGinn also explains the importance of apophatic theology for the mystical tradition. While Christian mysticism is concerned with the consciousness of God's presence, it has also articulated the significance of God's absence. In many of the mystics, the idea of the absence of God plays a crucial symbolic role to avoid the reification of the Divine mystery to human terms and images. The absent, transcendent God relativizes and deconstructs the false gods (the idols which reduce God to a present object or 'thing') and thus makes possible a consciousness of the Nothingness of God.³⁷ In this tradition of negative theology, no human image, concept, experience is allowed to capture or grasp the Otherness of the God beyond God. All positive affirmations of God (cataphatic theology) are negated and annulled (apophatic theology).

³⁷See John Scotus Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, Book 1, for an example of the naming of God as 'Nothing.' "Therefore the Divine Goodness which is called 'Nothing' for the reason that, beyond all things that are and that are not, it is found in no essence, descends from the negation of all essences into the affirmation of the essence of the whole universe..." Quoted in Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1994) 99.

Denys Turner and Michael Sells strongly accentuate this apophatic element in mystical theology. For Turner, apophatic theology is "that speech about God which is the failure of speech."³⁸ The nature of mystical language is one of self-subversion: insofar as language about God leads to certain affirmations, the apophatic element not only subverts and negates this affirmation, but further represents a negation of its own negation. There is a dynamic of metaphors both affirming speech about God and, consequently, denying and negating speech about God. It is this apophatic element which constitutes the mystical element in all theology, he contends. Hence for Turner, mysticism is inappropriately defined as a consciousness of God, since for him the point of apophaticism is to make us aware about the *failure* of our knowledge.³⁹ In a similar vein, Michael Sells argues that mystical language is a manner of speaking that disrupts the reification of language about the Divine: it is a language of unsaying. Apophasis, Sells explains, "leads to a continuing series of retractions, a propositionally unstable and dynamic discourse in which no single statement can rest on its own as true or false..."⁴⁰ Apophatic language is at odds with ordinary language in that it fails to refer to an

³⁸Denys Turner, The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 20.

³⁹ibid, 265. His point is well-taken that the apophatic element in theology upsets even a consciousness of God as a present 'thing' (a point which Bernard McGinn clearly recognizes, as we have seen). Insofar as language about God is necessary, however, a definition of mysticism which highlights an immediate consciousness of God's presence is to be preferred over an account which so highlights the limits of language about God that it is finally comes close to undermining the possibility of all God-talk. In short, there is a dialectic between cataphatic and apophatic language in Christian mysticism. See Bernard McGinn's review of Denys Turner's book in The Journal of Religion, Volume 77, Number 2 (April 1997) 309-11.

⁴⁰Michael Sells, Mystical Languages of Unsaying (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) 3. Sells mentions the Buddhist text The Vimalakirti Sutra as an example of the language of unsaying: "All constructs are empty....The construct that all constructs are empty is empty....The construct that the construct that all constructs are empty is empty is empty" (p.4).

intentional object, but instead plays with language in a manner that moves beyond the dichotomies of subject-object, self-other in a way that is analogous to mystical union.⁴¹

This apophatic moment of mystical theology alludes to the limitations of rational, objective speech about God. In order for a consciousness of God (or even a consciousness of our failure in knowledge) to be possible, more than an intellectual discourse is needed. Conversion to a new way of life is crucial. Insofar as encounter with God defies conceptualization, it must be presented in a form that is transformational rather than simply informational. In McGinn's view, the goal of mystical theology is not primarily to "convey a content but to assist the hearer or reader to hope for or to achieve the same consciousness."⁴² Apophasis is not merely an intellectual critique of discourse, then, but involves at the heart of its method forms of spiritual training and exercise (e.g., detachment) that seek to assist the student in cultivating a new consciousness and new way of life. In this sense, we might say that apophatic theology is a critique of an intellectualism that divorces theory from practice. Mystical texts seek not only to assert, but to evoke a sense of mystery, wonder and ineffability in the reader. Not unlike poetry, the actual form of such texts cannot be separated from the content if the goal is to provoke, stimulate, and transform the hearer or reader. The act of interpreting such a text requires an act of openness and surrender in order to encounter and participate in truth, beauty, the good. Only then will a sense of beauty and awe be able to effect a conversion or shock of recognition that leads us to new possibilities. Instead of being a mere

⁴¹Sells argues that if religious experience is always an experience of something, that is, if experience is intentional in that it must be in reference to an object, then mysticism is not an experience at all (ibid, 10, 214).

⁴²Bernard McGinn, The Foundations of Mysticism, op.cit., xvii.

reflection on truth, beauty, and the good, then, mystical theology hopes to produce persons who embody these spiritual realities.⁴³

In this vein, an important qualification concerning the nature of mysticism must be mentioned (since I have emphasized that Christian mysticism cannot be reduced to experience *per se*): we should not overstate a suspicion of experience as constituting mysticism. While experience is always mediated by interpretation, it would be a mistake to conclude that human nature is *only* comprised of an interpreting, intellectual faculty. For Christian mystics, mystical theology is not merely an epistemological discourse addressing the limits of human knowledge. Mystical theology is more than a lesson in Socratic ignorance.⁴⁴ While this language of unknowing is an important aspect of mystical theology, Christian mystics also express what they have come to understand as a transforming event in their lives. In their view, such an event is an encounter with God, a manifestation of God as pure gift and love. Some Christian mystics (traditionally seen as 'love mystics') will thus speak in an unabashed manner of their loving and ineffable

⁴³In the Platonic tradition, Andrew Louth explains, contemplation (*theoria*) of Truth, the Good, Beauty does not indicate a rational, objective study. Contemplation is, instead, participation in and union with the Good beyond being. The philosophical life, as Socrates and Plato understood it, is a process of training and education (*paideia*) to awaken us to the fact of our exile and, subsequently, to effect a conversion of the soul (Plato's *Republic* 518B-D). In Plato's *Phaedrus* or *Symposium*, moreover, this conversion occurs as a sudden disclosure or manifestation of Beauty or the Good. Beauty comes upon the soul as an epiphany (hence it is not simply attained) and produces awe, wonder, love. While Beauty or the Good is unknowable through detached, rational inquiry, knowledge of these spiritual realities is possible through an ecstatic communion. See Andrew Louth, Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition, op.cit., 3,6,9,13.

⁴⁴Nicholas of Cusa's famous doctrine of 'learned ignorance' is a case in point. While this doctrine emphasizes the limits of human knowledge, Nicholas is also insistent that such an insight into human ignorance and Divine Infinity came to him through a vision. In this sense, his doctrine is not merely a rational discovery, but rather the fruit of a transforming encounter with the Infinite. See his work in Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings trans. H. Lawrence Bond (New York: Paulist Press. 1997).

experiences of God (Bonaventure, Angela of Foligno, Mechtild of Magdeburg, Theresa of Avila, etc.). Such experiences always elude rational comprehension; they must be experienced for oneself. Bernard of Clairvaux, for instance, claims that mystical knowledge cannot be fully understood without experiencing for oneself. Indeed, for Bernard, all of human experience is read as a book from which we may learn.⁴⁵ Even with the more speculative and intellectual mystics, however, there is accorded a role for experience and love.⁴⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius, for instance, does not hesitate to speak of a knowledge born of experience. In reference to the wisdom of Hierotheus, he says, "...whatever he learned directly from the sacred writers, whatever his own perspicacious and laborious research of the scriptures uncovered for him, or whatever was made known to him through that more mysterious inspiration, not only learning but also experiencing the divine things (taught him the things of God) (my addition)." He continues that this mystical knowledge and union is something that cannot be taught, but is pure gift.⁴⁷

No doubt, the central place of love in Christian mysticism assumes that truth comes by affective and not simply intellectual means. Human experiences of suffering, death, transience, guilt, on the one hand, and joy, beauty, love, ecstasy, on the other, lie

⁴⁵See Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermons on the Song of Songs, Sermon 3, in Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works trans. Gillian Evans (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 221-24.

⁴⁶Bernard McGinn in his essay "Love, Knowledge, and *Unio Mystica* in the Western Christian Tradition" contends that the contrast between intellectual and affective mysticism is misleading. Such a contrast inevitably neglects the important role of love in the 'intellectual mystics' as it neglects the role of intellect for the 'love mystics.' Christian mystical theology, on the contrary, accords an important role both for intellect and love in the path to God. See his essay in the volume, Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam eds. Moshe Idel and Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1996).

⁴⁷See The Divine Names, Chapter 2.9, 648B, in Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works trans Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 65.

at the core of human life and many mystics experience these affective realities more intensely and deeply than others. There is, then, something extraordinary about the mystics that refuses domestication to the realm of the ordinary. They are excessive and as such often embody experiences of the uncanny, of the *mysterium et fascinans* that we others can only glimpse.

I would like to conclude this section on mysticism with an interpretation of Christian mysticism that strongly accents the excessive and transgressive character of the mystics. The work of Michel de Certeau is very creative and illuminating on the question of mysticism. First of all, he is as equally insistent as the above scholars on the significance of social and historical context for the study of mysticism. He also agrees that a reading of mysticism must operate via a reading of the texts themselves, not by the presumption of a particular 'experience'.⁴⁸ What is particularly fascinating about his work, however, is his emphasis on the transgressive and disruptive character of mysticism. Allow me to explain. The stress on the way in which a mystic is conditioned and determined by particular traditions, histories, and communities of belief and practice has led some scholars to insist that mysticism is conservative in nature.⁴⁹ No doubt the position that mystics are historical beings, limited in time and space and thus shaped by particular religious traditions and cultures, is a point well taken. This is an important

⁴⁸In his words: "To locate it (mystical thought) apart, to isolate it from the texts that exhaust themselves trying to express it, would be tantamount to exorcising it by providing it with its own place and name....From this angle, the problem is not to find out if an exegetic treatise by Gregory of Nyssa is based on the same experience as a discourse later called 'mystic'...." See The Mystic Fable. Volume One: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 15-16 (my addition).

⁴⁹Steven Katz argues that mysticism has a conservative character in Mysticism and Religious Traditions ed. Steven T. Katz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) 3-60.

corrective to the tendency to read mysticism as a timeless, pre-linguistic experience. The use of term 'conservative' is, nevertheless, inappropriate given the suspicion and even persecution that many mystics in the west endured. Something disruptive, disorderly and radical must have incited such a history of exclusion and subjugation. It is a truism of New Testament studies, for example, that any study of the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth must be able to account for the fact of his violent death at the cross. Even if it is overstated to consider all mystics as victims of oppression and death, many of them were indeed marginalized figures. Issues of power irrepressibly emerge even in the history of a phenomenon usually stereotyped as 'spiritual' and ahistorical. For de Certeau, therefore, the historical realities of *power and conflict* is a part of the history of mysticism. Attention to social, political, and economic history should play a role in the study of mysticism, he contends.

It is not inappropriate, then, to consider mysticism in relation to the history of heresy as de Certeau does. The history of exclusion and the restriction of movements, ideas, and figures by orthodoxy is not to be overlooked. For de Certeau, heresy "may be said to exist when a majority position has the power of naming in its own discourse a dissident formation and of excluding it as marginal."⁵⁰ The sameness of the dominant discourse represses what does not conform to its own forms of knowledge and belief. The legitimacy of orthodoxy is established through a perpetuation of the interests of particular groups and individuals against others (that which Marx named ideology). Thus, the transgressive character of the mystics appears for de Certeau not only in their daring

⁵⁰The Mystic Fable, op.cit., 18-19.

claim that they have a more direct and intense avenue to God than through the ordinary avenues of Church, sacrament, prayer, and ritual, but also through their suspect social histories. In other words, issues of class and race emerge as factors in the history of mysticism, he claims. It is through the poor, the illiterate, the mad, and the racially impure that mysticism proliferates in the early modern period, de Certeau contends. "In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the mystics most often belonged to the regions and social categories that were going into a socioeconomic recession, were disfavored by change, pushed aside by progress, or financially ruined by the wars."⁵¹ In Spanish mysticism, he continues, there was a strange alliance between mystical groups and those of 'impure' (Jewish) blood, the *marranos*. The *marranos* were those Jews in Spain who publicly professed Christianity, while continuing their Jewish traditions and religion in private. The Jews who fully became Christian, the *conversos*, were subject to a racism that would haunt them the rest of their lives. Forbidden by some religious orders, the *conversos* emerge in some mystical groups (e.g., the *Alumbrados*) in relatively large numbers.

It is in the marginalized faces of such mystics that de Certeau locates the genius of Christianity. In the circumstances of early modern mysticism, he states, "a certain solidarity with an age-old and collective suffering marked the locus of a 'wound' inseparable from a societal misfortune. At this point, an understanding is born by being touched by affliction."⁵² Such an understanding appears on the periphery of an

⁵¹ *ibid.*, 21-22.

⁵² *ibid.*, 25-26.

'Enlightened' scientific age; these figures offer an alternative illumination. Forms of knowledge born of suffering or born of love upset the rational, scientific paradigms of modern knowledge. Mystical forms of knowledge transgress and are intractable to the modern *logos*.⁵³ It is through the 'lowly' bodies of the mad, the illiterate, and women that mystical truth is articulated. For de Certeau, this marks a transition in the history of mysticism from the control of mystical truth by the authority of the Bible to the profusion of mystical wisdom in the lives of marginalized groups and persons. "Their knowledge took leave of its textual 'authorities' to become the gloss of 'wild' voices, producing the countless biographies of poor 'girls' or 'inspired illiterates' that made up a prolific stock of spiritual literature of the day."⁵⁴ It is at the heart of Christian wisdom to grant an authority and truth to the voices of the dispossessed and lowly, to those that the privileged discourse of society and culture considers foolish and mad. For de Certeau, and it is not surprising that he mentions Simone Weil here, it is through the lives of the outcasts and idiots that truth may be found. They speak a truth that is unrecognizable to all but the most attentive persons. It is precisely their transgression of the dominant social, cultural, and religious norms and values (and not their conservation of these norms!) that attracts de Certeau to the mystics.

⁵³For a contemporary reading of the excessive and transgressive character of the Christian mystics in relation to post-modernity see David Tracy, "Literary Theory and Naming God," in The Journal of Religion, Volume 74, Number 3, July 1994, 302-19.

⁵⁴The Mystic Fable, op.cit., 26.

Prophecy

The term 'prophecy' is no less complicated a term than that of mysticism. This section on prophecy will hope to clarify this term by examining both the diversity of expressions that have been counted as 'prophecy' (from early prophecy to late prophecy) and the more recognizable, classic understanding of prophecy. In distinguishing between early/late and classic prophecy we will be in a better position to isolate the unique contributions of the prophetic heritage. Methodologically, we will have the chance to examine in brief the contributions of historical criticism on the diversity of prophecy, even if theological interpretations of classic prophecy are at the heart of this present work.

Modern historical criticism has contributed much to our understanding of this term, especially in the context of the ancient Near East. Studies which relate Hebrew prophecy to Mesopotamian, Canaanite, Egyptian, and Greek forms of prophecy reveal the plurality of expressions which have the title 'prophetic' imputed to them. In this Near Eastern context, prophecy was often associated with ecstasy, divination, oracles, and the prediction of future events.⁵⁵ Even in the context of the Hebrew bible, however, there is a broad variety of phenomena that has been counted as prophecy. Joseph Blenkinsopp contends that one consequence of such diversity is that those whom we refer to as *the*

⁵⁵Robert Wilson mentions that in Canaan, prophecy appeared to be ecstatic in character. In 1 Kings, Baal's prophets are depicted as cutting themselves in order to induce a kind of ecstatic frenzy. In competition with the prophet Elijah, Baal's prophets cry out to their God: "They called out louder and splashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until blood gushed over them. Noon passed and they remained in a frenzied state until the time for offering sacrifice" (18:28-29). In Mesopotamia there is evidence of prophetic figures (from the 18th century tablets of Mari) such as 'the ecstatic' (*muhhu*) and the 'answerer' (*apilu*). These figures probably had established roles within the religious and political establishments. In Egypt, prophecy played a major role within the established order and was connected with the priesthood. There is no mention of ecstasy in relation to Egyptian prophecy. None of these examples appear to manifest a distinctive ethical character. See Robert Wilson, Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) 89-134.

prophets formed only a small portion of prophets in Israelite history.⁵⁶ It is this small portion of prophets, nevertheless, that has stimulated such a powerful and influential legacy. It is with the classical prophets that recognizable characteristics come to forefront: ethical monotheism, critique of idolatry, compassion for the poor and oppressed, rebuke and denunciation of injustice and disobedience. "Protest on behalf of the poor and disadvantaged, the victims of an exploitive social and political order," Blenkinsopp agrees, "is one of the most powerful strands in the tradition of prophetic preaching."⁵⁷

In this vein, Michael Fishbane suggests that it is with the classical prophets of the eighth to fifth centuries that "the uniquely Israelite prophetic type comes to expression--as against the professional mantic types that preceded it (and even coexisted with it) or the apocalyptic types that followed centuries later."⁵⁸ Thus, while it is important to note some of the early and late forms of Israelite prophecy, the focus of this work is on classical Israelite prophecy as well as Christian interpretations of this legacy. In short, in addition to the heritage of the classic Hebrew prophets, the understanding of prophecy in western history is indebted to the following two elements: 1) a Christian theology of the cross and 2) an awareness of suffering and violence in human experience. Along these lines, this chapter and dissertation hopes to show that prophecy has affinities with the experiences of evil and tragedy in history.

In some strands of the biblical literature, prophecy is associated with ecstasy.

⁵⁶Joseph Blenkinsopp, A History of Prophecy in Israel (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983) 15.

⁵⁷ibid, 17.

⁵⁸Michael Fishbane, "Biblical Prophecy as a Religious Phenomenon" in Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible Through the Middle Ages ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994) 63.

Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha are occasionally portrayed as ecstatics. In 1Samuel, Samuel is told that he will come upon a band of prophets playing music, in a state of prophetic frenzy. "Then the spirit of the Lord will possess you, and you will be in a prophetic frenzy along with them and be turned into a different person" (10:5-6). And so it happened that when Samuel met this band of prophets the spirit of the Lord possessed him and he fell into a frenzy that caused all the people to wonder, "Is Saul among the prophets?" (10:9-13). Elsewhere in the book of 1Samuel, Saul sends a group of messengers to arrest David, who is in the company of Samuel's prophetic group. Their failure in this mission is attested to an unexpected encounter with the spirit of God. "But when they saw the band of prophets, presided over by Samuel, in a prophetic frenzy, they too fell into the prophetic state" (19:20). Eventually Saul himself goes to arrest David but fares no better than his messengers. "At the sheds near Ramah he, too, stripped himself of his garments and he, too, remained in the prophetic state in the presence of Samuel..." (19:23-34). In the book of Numbers, moreover, Moses gathers seventy elders and the spirit of the Lord comes upon them causing them to prophesy. Alarmed by the state of these people, a young man implores Moses to stop them. Moses responds: "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!" (11:29).

While the Lord puts his spirit upon all the prophets, Moses enjoys a special, more immediate relationship with God: "When there are prophets among you, I the Lord make myself known to them in visions; I speak to them in dreams. Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak face to face--clearly, not in

riddles..." (Numbers 12:6-8). While this passage seems to accept the validity (if imperfect) of a more archaic revelation of God through dreams and visions, with Moses and his followers, the prophets, the proclamation of the divine word (the Law) to the people plays a central role. It is through the covenant that God has spoken clearly and not in riddles. As we will see, the classic prophets express a greater skepticism concerning dreams and visions than this understanding in Numbers; instead allegiance to the covenant and ethical responsibility begin to govern the prophetic message in a more prominent manner. Finally, it should be noted that in other instances a prophetic vocation is related to victory in battle. The prophetess Deborah, for instance, leads Israel to victory against the Canaanites (Judges 4-5). In this way, prophets may have acted to inspire and motivate the warriors for battle.⁵⁹

Another characteristic of early prophecy is the professional organization of prophets within guilds. In this case, the prophets played an important role within the cult and the royal court (1Samuel 3; 9:11-14; 13:8-15). Many of the 'classic prophets' reproach these figures for their complacency and self-motivated interests. Micah charges that these prophets "give oracles for money" (3:11) and Amos is persistent in his claim that he is no prophet and, thus, autonomous from sanctuary or court (7:10-14). We can guess that the functions of these professional prophets involved the advising of kings concerning a proposed military or political adventure. Such prophets were organized in guilds and made their living through their commitments to cult and court. Their voices

⁵⁹Max Weber's classical work on prophecy contends that the earliest strand of Israelite prophecy is marked by warrior ecstasy and devotion to the god of the tribe. He argues that only with the establishment of the monarchy is this primitive type of orgiastic war prophecy replaced by a professional army. See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *op.cit.*, 42, 61-64.

were crucial in legitimating the aspirations of the royal courts as well as the office of kingship itself.⁶⁰

In contrast to these early Israelite prophets of the biblical narratives, the classic prophets do not exhibit any significant ecstatic behavior, nor are they tied to the cult or court. The principal task of the classic prophet is to proclaim the word of God in the form of rebuke, exhortation, warning, or doom to the nation Israel.⁶¹ In the book of Deuteronomy, the Israelite prophet is strongly contrasted with diviners, soothsayers, sorcerers, and those who seek oracles from the dead. In contrast to these false prophets, the Lord will directly put his words in the mouth of the prophet (18:9-22). With Jeremiah the contrast between false prophets committed to dreams and divination, on the one hand, and true prophets who proclaim God's word faithfully, on the other, is amplified. "I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!' How long? Will the hearts of the prophets even turn back--those who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart?...Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" (23:25-26, 29). The fateful call to proclaim the awesome and shattering word of God becomes central to the identity of the classic prophet. As Hosea has it: "Therefore I have hewn

⁶⁰Samuel is crucial in legitimating the establishment of the monarchy and king Saul (1Samuel 10:17-27). Ahijah of Shiloh establishes Jeroboam as king of Israel (1Kings 11:29-39). The presence of prophets associated in guilds around the court is portrayed in 1Kings 22. Here King Ahab is seeking a military alliance with King Jehoshaphat to fight Ramoth-gilead. King Ahab then assembles all his prophets who then give their word of support for the campaign. Only one marginal prophet, Micaiah, son of Imlah, speaks a harsh word of disapproval. The office of prophecy tied to the court is clearly depicted here. Only the one autonomous from the king's prophetic guild is able to utter a critical word.

⁶¹Michael Fishbane argues that the classic prophet "proclaims to the entire nation God's unsolicited message of rebuke, exhortation, warning, or doom...Their prophetic discourse is God's self-initiated *davar*: his event-filled and event-begetting word" (op.cit. 65).

them by the prophets. I have slain them by the words of my mouth" (6:5). In this understanding of prophecy, the classic prophets address the nation as a whole, unlike some of the earlier prophets concerned with the destiny of individuals, such as the king. In this sense, the prophetic call involves a public function. It cannot be reduced to a private, ecstatic experience.

The call of the prophet comes to him as an explosive compulsion to speak on behalf of God. Michael Fishbane explains that the call of the prophet comes as an overwhelming and unexpected event. There is a suddenness to this event that is at odds with the requisite preparations and spiritual exercises in the mystical traditions, he contends.⁶² This abrupt call brings a terrifying awareness that one has been fatefully called to a life of divine service. A feeling of finitude and inadequacy often accompanies this awareness. Isaiah shudders in the face of the transcendent God and cries out, "Woe is me, for I am undone. I am a man of impure lips" (6:5) (a response, Fishbane notes, that recalls Moses' claim that he is a man of uncircumcised lips--Exodus 4:10; 6:12). It is the same with Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Jeremiah exclaims, "Woe, Lord Yahweh! Surely I cannot prophesy, for I am but a novice" (1:7). Jeremiah even shouts "violence and plunder" against the God who plants His irresistible word within his heart. God's word burns within him and consumes him like a fire; he cannot contain it within him (20:7-9). Ezekiel, too, falls to his face in terror until he is commanded to rise up to his new life and task (1:28-2:7).

The interruptive nature of these calls is at odds with the institutionalization of

⁶²ibid, 64.

prophecy in terms of an office or guild. Amos was merely a herdsman when Yahweh came to him and said, "Go, prophesy to my people, Israel" (7:14-15). The power of God's word results in a state of self-surrender on the part of the prophet. "If a lion roars," Amos says, "who does not fear? Now my Lord Yahweh has spoken, who can but prophesy?" (3:8). This autonomy from a professional guild granted the prophet a freedom to stand against the dominant socio-political and religious authorities. It is also responsible, however, for the life of isolation and ignominy that the prophetic vocation brought with it. It leads Jeremiah to lament not only his solitary existence (15:17), but more radically his existence as a whole. "Why did I come forth from the womb, to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?" (20:18). Isaiah, as well, was a man of suffering, despised by all. He can only express his hope in the hidden face of Yahweh (8:17; 5:19).

In terms of form, we can distinguish early prophecy from classical by the narrative form of early prophecy and the historical form of the latter. Classical prophecy is a collection of orally proclaimed sayings of historical individuals. The importance of the historical context of these sayings is stressed in these texts.⁶³ The historical events and experiences of Israel is a crucial factor in the message and fate of the prophet. Hans Walter Wolff explains this in contrast to wisdom literature: "Unlike the legal definitions and wisdom sayings with their generally applicable and mostly individual significance, the prophetic speeches have a precise historical function. They steer Israel through great

⁶³Amos says that he is prophesying "two years before the earthquake" (1:1); Isaiah "in the year king Uzziah died" (6:1); Jeremiah "in the days of Josiah...in the 13th year of his reign" (1:2); and Ezekiel in "the 5th year of the exile of king Jehoiachim" (1:2).

historical changes."⁶⁴ Hence, the true prophet receives the word of God as an event in history. Divine communication occurs through the medium of verbal contact and not primarily through visual image or form.

With regard to content, what exactly do the classic prophets announce? For one, they often announce that since Israel has failed to remain loyal to the covenant, God will terminate the special, chosen relationship with Israel. As Amos says, "The end has come upon my people Israel" (8:2). Amos proclaims that the day of Yahweh will no longer be one of light, but rather a day of darkness and woe. The chosen people liberated from Egypt, he concludes, no longer have a privileged status over the other nations (9:7). Hosea also exclaims, "You are not my people and I am not your God (1:9). Isaiah contends that Israel is now the victim and not benefactor of God's wrath in holy war (28:21). There is indeed a tone of pessimism that often pervades the message of the prophets. The sins of the people are seen as almost irredeemable, hopeless. Hosea remarks: "Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of harlotry is within them" (5:4). Jeremiah is equally skeptical about the people turning from their evil ways. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?" (13:23). In this framework, the task of the prophet is to proclaim God's word regardless of the success of their vocation. God commands Ezekiel to speak to the people "and whether they hear or refuse to hear, they will know that there has been a prophet among them" (3:8-9; 2:4-5).

⁶⁴Hans Walter Wolff, "Prophecy From the Eighth through the Fifth Century" in Interpreting the Prophets ed. James Luther Mays and Paul J. Achtemeier (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) 16.

Compelling demands of compassion and justice towards the poor and dispossessed are often at the heart of the prophet's excoriating words. Unlike Near Eastern myth, Michael Fishbane explains, the disruption of harmony and order in creation and history occurs through human sin for the prophets.⁶⁵ Sin is the human revolt against the transcendent, autonomous creator God. The prophet is a spokesperson of God on behalf of the covenant and the ethical responsibilities demanded therein. In particular, it is the example of Moses which inspires the ethical-religious sayings of the prophets. The story of Exodus, as a story of liberation from oppression and servitude, pervades the lives and words of the prophets. Invocation of fidelity to the covenant will always call to mind the memory of this bondage and God's redemptive response. Beyond cultic worship, then, loyalty to the covenant is realized through acts of mercy, kindness, justice, and compassion (Micah 6:6-8). As Isaiah has it, true fasting is "to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke...to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house..." (58:6-7). For the prophets, then, the wrath of God is not entirely unpredictable: it is the divine response to sin. In this sense, Fishbane argues, the question of theodicy in the prophets is determined by the perfect justice and providence of God. The presence of evil is not seen as a random product of fate or chance (as in tragedy). Rather suffering is dispensed by a just God to a disobedient people. In his words: "For ancient Israelite covenant theology, the terrors of history are the consequences of sinful human actions. The prophets, profoundly aware of this fact, warn or alert the people...to the implications

⁶⁵Fishbane, op.cit., 67-68.

of sin, repentance, and obedience."⁶⁶

It is also the case, however, that the prophets are often uneasy with the simple explanation of suffering and evil in terms of human sin. In the face of suffering, Amos cries out, "O Lord God, please forgive, cease," and is answered by the willingness of God to relent (7:2-3). In the book of Numbers, Moses is displeased with God at his apparent absence in the desert. The people are weeping, crying for food to eat and Moses shouts at God, "If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once..." (11:10-15). Not unlike Job, Jeremiah protests his case against God: "You will be in the right, O Lord, when I lay charges against you; but let me put my case to you. Why does the way of the guilty prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?" (12:1). Jeremiah boldly asks, "Why have you struck us down so that there is no healing for us?" (14:19). In this same chapter, Jeremiah daringly compares God to a confused stranger who turns away from the needy in time of trouble (14:8-9). For Ezekiel, furthermore, the prophet has the awful task of confronting the fire of God's wrath: "And I sought for a man among them who would build a hedge and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I would not destroy it; but I found none. Therefore have I consumed them with the fire of my wrath" (22:30-31).⁶⁷ The prophet Habakkuk utters these words of confusion in the face of suffering: "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you 'Violence!' and you will not save?" (1:2). True, it is quite clear that, on the

⁶⁶ibid, 76.

⁶⁷This understanding of the prophetic vocation (as the one who is willing to stand against the fire of God's wrath) is modeled on the example of Moses during the 'golden calf' incident. In this story, Moses calls upon God to turn from His fierce wrath and to remember the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. God then relents and holds back His destructive wrath. See Exodus 32:11-14.

whole, the prophets interpret the suffering and violence of history in terms of human sin. This does not, however, preclude them from voicing consternation and terror in the face of evil and suffering. Abraham Joshua Heschel expresses perfectly the consternation of the prophets in the face of evil. "It is one of the essential paradoxes of prophetic thinking," Heschel writes, "that, although the prophet speaks continually of the people's guilt and of dreadful punishment in store for them, once the disaster comes he is stunned, puzzled, unable to justify completely the full measure of suffering."⁶⁸

This ability to be profoundly moved and stunned by the suffering of others is at the heart of the prophetic vision, Heschel adds. For Heschel, prophecy is the voice of the agony of humanity; it is a form of poetry that is marked by anguish and agitation, not tranquillity. Sensitivity to evil is a major characteristic of the Israelite prophet.⁶⁹ The prophet bewails the abysmal indifference to evil. The prophet's fury and indignation strikes like a hammer the callousness and apathy of human beings. While most of the world continues in its merry way, the prophets are appalled at the sight of injustice and wickedness in human affairs. The prophet is attuned to cries imperceptible to others. Walter Brueggemann concurs with this reading of prophecy. For Brueggemann, prophecy

⁶⁸ Abraham Joshua Heschel, The Prophets, Volume I (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) 177. There are many attractive features to the work of Heschel. For one, his purpose in this work on the prophets is an interpretation of the prophetic *consciousness* primarily and only secondarily the historical context. In this sense he succeeds brilliantly. Second, his demand that the study of the prophets must involve a passionate willingness to think with and not merely about the prophets is, I believe, a very welcome method which is often lacking in historical-criticism. In this sense, he insists that we must be willing to be provoked, engaged, and transformed by the prophetic voices.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 3-5.

begins with the capacity to groan and mourn.⁷⁰ A *pathos* and anguish permeates the vision of the prophets, thus enabling them to speak of the terror, mortality, and suffering that others deny or remain indifferent towards. Woe to those, Amos says, "who drink wine from bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!" (6:6). Jeremiah cries out: "Be appalled, O heavens, at this, be shocked, be utterly desolate..." (2:12). While others may notice the harmony and beauty inherent in creation, the prophets are sensitive to the nocturnal face of existence, the realities of conflict, violence, and suffering. "The world is a proud place, full of beauty," Heschel remarks, "but the prophets are scandalized, and rave as if the whole world were a slum."⁷¹ Everyone seems to the prophet blind and deaf for ignoring the violence of history. As Isaiah puts it, the prophetic vocation is to lead to a disclosure and unconcealing of truth: "the earth will disclose the blood shed on it, and will no longer cover its slain" (26:21).

Heschel continues that an awareness of force and violence is at the heart of the prophetic interpretation of history. For the prophets, history is discontinuous and marked by rupture, disorder, suffering.⁷² History is blemished by wars, slaughter, conquest, oppression, slavery. The idolatry of might dominates human history and for the prophets it is precisely this idol which is the most abominable sin. Amos attacks those "who store

⁷⁰Walter Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) 20-21, 51, 56.

⁷¹Heschel, *op.cit.*, 9. "To us the moral state of society, for all its stains and spots, seems fair and trim; to the prophet it is dreadful....Our standards are modest; our sense of injustice tolerable, timid; our moral indignation impermanent; yet human violence is interminable, unbearable, permanent" (*ibid.*).

⁷²*ibid.*, 174.

up violence and robbery in their strongholds" (3:10). Habakkuk denounces "guilty men, whose own might is their god" (1:11). "Their course is evil, their might is not right," exclaims Jeremiah (23:10). Micah cries out that the rich are full of violence (6:12). The level of violence and injustice at a personal level is magnified at the level of nations and groups. Amos is particularly brilliant in the universal scope of his scrutiny. For Amos, the brutal aggression of empires and nations witnesses to the terrors of history. Nations pursue one another with the sword, ripping up women and children, slaughtering and raping people, driving them into captivity and selling them into slavery (1:3-15).⁷³ Hosea censures conquerors who devastate cities and slash to pieces women and children (10:14). The cruelty of conquerors who make cities like a desert is despised by Isaiah (14:7). The prophet Nahum condemns the violence of the Assyrians whom he compares to a vicious lion: "The lion has torn enough for his whelps and strangled prey for his lionesses; he has filled his caves with prey and his dens with torn flesh" (2:12).

The idolatry of might is in stark contrast to the prophet's vision of peace and justice. Swords are to be turned into ploughshares and God's might will lay low the pride and violence of humanity (Isaiah 2:4). "The haughty eyes of people shall be brought low, and the pride of everyone shall be humbled; and the Lord alone will be exalted on that day" (Isaiah 2:11-17). While human history adores might and power, the prophets locate God's presence in the faces of the weak and helpless. It is through the outcasts of history that the event of God's revelation is disclosed. First and foremost for the prophets, it is

⁷³ibid, 162. Amos castigates Gaza because "they carried into exile entire communities" and the Ammonites because "they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead in order to enlarge their territory" (1:6,13).

through the oppressed nation Israel that God's mercy and justice has come to history. "For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal, say the Lord, because they have called you an outcast: 'It is Zion; no one cares for her!' (Jeremiah 30:17). In Isaiah's mind, moreover, it is through the suffering servant that redemption comes to Israel. "He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; as one from whom others hide their faces..." (53:3). The death of this powerless, afflicted one becomes the salvation of many, Isaiah says. It is not by might, but by suffering love that humanity will prevail.

Even in the face of the prophetic interpretation of history (history as a nightmare), the prophets exhibit a profound sense of hope. While they announce that the end has come upon Israel, they also speak of new beginnings. Their attention to violence and power in history leads not to despair, but to a chastened hope. In spite of Yahweh's harsh measures, there will come a time, Hosea announces, when God will embrace his beloved nation and make Israel his wife. On that day even a covenant with nature will be established. "Therefore, I will now allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her...I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will take you for my wife forever..." (2:14,18-19). The new covenant that is to come, says Jeremiah, will be inscribed on the hearts of the people. No longer will instruction and obedience to the Law be an onerous obligation; instead, God will place the Law within the hearts of the people and they will freely and joyfully fulfill the new covenant (31:31-

34). For Ezekiel as well, the new covenant that is to come will replace the people's hearts of stone with hearts of flesh. God's spirit will cleanse and renew Israel (36:26-27). A new Exodus is announced by Isaiah. Captive Jerusalem will rise up and shatter the chains that bind them (52:1-6). A new servant will be a light to the nations, Isaiah states, bringing God's teaching and justice to all the nations. "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights...I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness" (42:1,6-7). Through this new covenant, Isaiah continues, God will hear the people's cries of affliction and will no longer hide himself. "Though the Lord may give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself any more, but your eyes shall see your Teacher" (30:20).

To be sure, the idea of prophecy in Christianity continues many of themes we have examined from the Hebrew bible (the Old or First Testament for Christians). In a Christian context, prophecy is witness to the Word of God disclosed in history through the event and person Jesus Christ. Christian prophecy is witness to the new covenant in Christ, the Suffering Servant. For Christians, (following the prophet Isaiah) God is revealed not in power, glory, and wealth. God is revealed, instead, in the powerless and afflicted figure of Jesus of Nazareth. Christian theology inaugurates a reversal and transvaluation of the world's values: the mighty are humbled while the poor and humble are exalted. In the words of the lowly figure of Mary: "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good

things, and sent the rich away empty" (Luke 1:52-53). For St. Paul, the wisdom of God shames the wisdom of the world. God chose what is low and despised in the world to reduce to nothing the things that are powerful and wise (1Corinthians 1:18-31). It is through the scandalous and ignominious death of Christ at the cross that God is revealed to humanity, Paul claims. Unlike the old covenant in which God remained hidden to Israel, veiled by Moses, in Jesus Christ we are able to see the glory of the Lord face to face. "And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2Corinthians 3:18).

A theology of the cross is often at the heart of the Christian interpretation of prophecy, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly. Walter Brueggemann suggests that if the prophecy of the Hebrew bible begins with the capacity to mourn and suffer on behalf of others, then Jesus of Nazareth is an exemplary prophet.⁷⁴ Jesus understood and embodied the anguish of the prophets. Far from being impassible and invulnerable, the spirit of Jesus was profoundly moved by the suffering of the people he encountered. The plight of the outcasts and poor kindled compassion and love in the spirit of Jesus. Indeed, he saw his own mission as bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to captives, setting the oppressed free (Luke 4:18). His willingness to grieve is evident in Jesus' lament over the death of Lazarus: "When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled; and he

⁷⁴Brueggemann suggests that the crucifixion of Jesus only continues the theme of the pathos of God in the Hebrew bible. See Brueggemann, *op.cit.*, 88-90, 93, 95.

said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus wept" (John 11:33-35). Of course, the anguish and suffering Jesus endured is no more obvious than in the crucifixion. Even prior to the moment of his death, in the garden of Gethsemane, he cries out in great agitation and distress for God to alter his fate (Mark 14:32-36). Finally at the moment of his death he utters the words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34).

If one were to do an exhaustive study of Christian forms of prophecy it would be important to study the apocalyptic milieu of early Christianity, clearly an impossible task for the present more limited study of prophecy. It must suffice to mention that eschatological expectations of a dramatic and final divine intervention in human history, on the one hand, and the hope in eternal salvation, on the other, pervades early Christian thought.⁷⁵ This apocalyptic milieu of Christianity is both a continuation of themes from the Hebrew bible and also an authentically new development. For example, such scholars as Richard Horsley and John Hanson explain that this new context of the inter-testamental period witnesses the emergence of a new prophet that should be distinguished from the classic oracular prophets.⁷⁶ In distinction from the classic oracular prophet (whose mission was to pronounce the impending judgement or redemption by God), they refer to this new prophet as a popular/action prophet. The mission of the 'action prophet' was

⁷⁵John J. Collins mentions the following definition of apocalypse: "a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world." See his The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992) 4.

⁷⁶See Richard A. Horsley and John S. Hanson, Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements at the Time of Jesus (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1985) 135.

to inspire and lead a popular movement to vigorous participation in an anticipated redemptive action by God. This prophet lived in an apocalyptic context when the Jewish faith was pushed to the brink of despair by extreme situations of oppression and foreign threat.⁷⁷ Large numbers of people inspired and convinced of God's imminent action abandoned their work and homes to follow charismatic leaders into the wilderness. Horsley and Hanson mention the following quote by Josephus: "Thus fired by the Spirit, these prophets and their followers thought they were about to participate in the divine transformation of a world gone awry into a society of justice, willed and ruled by God."⁷⁸ Because these movements were often perceived as threats to the Roman Imperial order (for suggesting that the end of their oppression was near at hand), such prophets and movements were often violently repressed by Rome.⁷⁹ Both prophets and followers were acting on the conviction that their liberation from oppression was about to be initiated by God.

One such prophet was John the Baptist. It seems that John was seen as a new Elijah, come to preach a baptism of repentance and to proclaim the imminent eschatological arrival of God. John must have had a large following since he was clearly perceived as a threat by the political authorities, especially Herod Antipas. Josephus

⁷⁷ibid, 151.

⁷⁸ibid, 161.

⁷⁹Horsley and Hanson mention one example, a prophet called Theudas. This man, Josephus explains, "persuaded most of the common people to take their possessions and follow him to the Jordan River. He said he was a prophet and that at his command the river would be divided and allow them an easy crossing" (ibid. 164). In response to this movement, the Roman governor of Judea captured Theudas and beheaded him. Horsley and Hanson suggest that Theudas invokes both the traditions of Exodus and the Conquest. Theudas will lead the people to the desert and God will liberate them from their bondage.

describes John as a "good man, who demanded that the Jews be intent on virtue, and conduct themselves with justice towards one another and piety towards God, and to come together in baptism....But when others rallied behind him--for they were greatly stirred by his speeches--Herod feared that such convincing eloquence among the people might lead to some sort of uprising, for they seemed to heed his every word. Anticipating trouble, he decided to eliminate him before he provoked a rebellion..."⁸⁰ The idea of prophecy in the Christian tradition, therefore, is profoundly shaped by prophetic figures such as John the Baptist. In this context, prophecy takes on eschatological and apocalyptic connotations that were, at best, inchoate within the prophetic canon. Expressions of eternal salvation of the elect, for example, emerge in this apocalyptic milieu and are strikingly absent from the classic prophets, indeed from the Hebrew bible as a whole.

Attention to the apocalyptic milieu and social history of the inter-testamental period is crucial for understanding the interpretation of prophecy in the Christian tradition. In this sense, the work of Horsley, Hanson and other social historians is beneficial for studying the social history and popular prophetic movements at the time of Jesus (in addition to the literary sources of the Scriptures). It is fair to say that Jesus represents a prophet in continuity with the classic prophet who proclaimed God's word in the form of rebuke, exhortation, judgement, and redemption, on the one hand, and as a popular/action prophet who attracted a following by preaching and inaugurating a new eschatological age that would be marked by truth, justice, and mercy, on the other. It is

⁸⁰ibid, 177.

this age, Jesus proclaimed, that would witness the incarnation of the Kingdom of God in history.

CHAPTER TWO

MYSTICISM, MARXISM, AND WORK IN SIMONE WEIL

It is no small task to combine a Platonic and Christian mystical vision with an awareness and recognition of the dark and destructive presence of power and force in human history and nature. This is the formidable task which Simone Weil engages.¹ With Plato, Weil contends that a central goal of the philosophical life is the remembering of forgotten truth (ICAG 76). In the thought of Weil, however, the major cause of the loss of memory is the destructive presence of force in human life. Force in the form of conquest, slavery, rape, and oppressive conditions of work uproots the human spirit from community and tradition, on the one hand, and destroys human thought and attention, on the other. Whole traditions and spiritualities are forgotten and lost at the hands of force. The central task of this chapter is to interpret and clarify the relationship between Weil's

¹The classic scholar of mysticism Baron von Hugel in *The Mystical of Religion, vol.2* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1908) insists that mysticism must confront the dark and evil face of existence if it is to avoid being too optimistic and a-historical. In his words: "First of all, I would strongly insist upon the following great fact to which human life and history bear witness....It is, that not the smoother, easier times and circumstances in the lives of individuals and of peoples, but, on the contrary, the harder and hardest trials of every conceivable kind, and the unshrinking, full acceptance of these, as part of the price of conscience and of its growing light, have ever been the occasions of the deepest trust in and love of God to which man has attained" (p.291-92). vonHugel even suggests that this confrontation with evil and suffering may even "seem to confirm Schopenhauer at his gloomiest" (ibid).

ideas of mysticism and her reflections on force and necessity in relation to human labor.

In addition to the damaging effects of force and violence, Weil contends, the formation of the modern world and the notion of historical evolution has influenced this loss of memory, especially in regards to the exclusion of the defeated of history, the victims of force (NFR 219). "No attention is paid to the defeated...They become naught" (NFR 212). In this view, the central task of philosophy is to love that part of the past which is "inarticulate, anonymous, and which has vanished" (NFR 222). To do so requires a creative attention that sees what is invisible, what has been destroyed by force. This vision of the invisible past is contemplation for Weil and, following Plato, it is love (WFG 149, ICAG 134). In the perspective of Weil, this love of the invisible and anonymous past militates against the modern illusion and bias regarding the present. We moderns believe that we have evolved beyond the primitive thought of the past. Among other things, decreation in Simone Weil is an interruption and critique of this modern bias. The idea of decreation in Weil is a decentering and emptying of the self in regards to both space and time. As she observes in her notebooks: "To annul perspective in time as we do in space. Eternity. Hence the power of memory..." (FLNB 85). The decentering of the self in time makes possible a reception of Other voices beyond the monotone voice of modernity. The decentering of the self in space makes possible a reception of Other voices beyond, first, the political and economic elite of society, and secondly, beyond European and 'first world' countries.

Most persuasive in Weil's retrieval of the past (forgotten truth) is her refusal to lend this task a reactionary and romantic form. "Love of the past has nothing to do with any

reactionary political attitude" (NFR 49). Indeed, the retrieval of spiritual treasures of the past is to inspire a resistance against the subjugation of marginalized voices. An honest recognition of the destructive impact of force with regard to such powerless voices is the condition for the possibility of a spirituality.

There is nothing crueller towards the past than the commonplace according to which force is powerless to destroy spiritual values; by virtue of this opinion we deny that civilizations obliterated by the violence of arms ever existed...So we slay a second time what has perished...Piety enjoins reverent attention to the traces, however scarce, of destroyed civilizations, and an attempt to conceive what their spirit was. (SE 43).²

As in the thought of Walter Benjamin, the preservation of the past is a critical act for Simone Weil.³ As this chapter will demonstrate, central to the thought of Weil is the preservation of spiritual treasures for the enrichment and inspiration of workers, in particular.

For the purpose of this chapter I will focus on two voices in particular that have been excluded and forgotten in the modern world: the voice of workers and the voice of mystics. The Enlightenment is in part culpable for the marginalization of these voices, contends Weil. "We are living at time when most people feel, confusedly but keenly, that what was called enlightenment in the 18th century, including the sciences, provides an insufficient spiritual diet...There is an urgent need to refer back to those great epochs

²For good discussions of this passage in the thought of Weil see Gabriella Fiori, Simone Weil: An Intellectual Biography trans. Joseph Berrigan (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989) 223 and David McLellan, Utopian Pessimist: The Life and Thought of Simone Weil (New York: Poseidon Press, 1990) 156-57.

³In the words of Benjamin: "To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was'. It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger....In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of the AntiChrist." See Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in Illuminations ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) 255.

which favored the kind of spiritual life of which all that is most precious in science and art is no more than a somewhat imperfect reflection" (SL 131). Weil's reflections on the mysticism of work is central to her retrieval of both the voices of workers and the voices of the mystical traditions. While work is the central bridge to the mystical form of life, oppressive and dehumanizing conditions of work are major obstacles to the cultivation of a mystical consciousness. Therefore, work is the limit of and possibility for mysticism. The transformation of oppressive conditions of work is, in this light, a condition for the possibility of the mystical life.⁴

In order to demonstrate such a claim, this chapter will attend to three tasks: first, to clarify the meaning of the terms 'mysticism' and 'spirituality' in the thought of Weil; second, to explore the ways in which Weil's understanding of mysticism is accessible to the working classes; third, to examine how work is both an obstacle and bridge to the mystical life.

Spirituality and Mysticism in the Thought of Simone Weil

In the thought of Simone Weil the use of the term spirituality is a more general term than mysticism which may include non-Christian forms of thought and practice (i.e. Greek or even Marxian forms). In distinction from spirituality, mysticism in the thought of Weil is a more specific Christian vision concerned with an explicit consciousness of God

⁴While this statement claims that certain conditions are necessary for a mystical consciousness to emerge, I am not arguing that God's grace is invalidated as pure gift. As Gustavo Gutierrez explains, there is a tension between the duty and obligation in building the kingdom, on the one hand, and the Christian belief that the kingdom is entirely the fruit of God's gratuitous love, on the other. Christians must be ready to both act as if everything depends upon ourselves, and believe as if everything depends on God (Augustine). See Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation (New York: Orbis Books, 1973) 171, 177, 227.

(linked with a theology of the cross), on the one hand, and with apophatic discourse, on the other.

"The word spirituality doesn't imply any particular affiliation...It would not be difficult to find in Marx quotations that can all be brought back to the reproach of a lack of spirituality levelled at capitalist society..." (NFR 93). Indeed, Weil's understanding of spirituality is quite broad. It has affinities, as we will see, with Pierre Hadot's reading of spiritual exercises in the Greek philosophical tradition. In her book *The Need For Roots* Weil cogently articulates a notion of spirituality that she hopes will imbue society with a greater humility and piety. Her promotion of the term spirituality is not undertaken, however, without a certain misgiving. With good justification she is afraid that the conception will be corrupted. "But one can only lay hold of such a conception in fear and trembling. How can we touch it without soiling it, turning it into a lie?" (NFR 93). In addition to her fear of 'spirituality' being sentimentally reduced to a kind of feeling of consolation or special state of experience, Weil worries that it will become attached to a cause, movement, regime, or nation (NFR 93). If this corruption of spirituality is avoided, spirituality may enrich society and lead to an expression of thought which is guided by humility, beauty and justice. Moreover, and in keeping with some contemporary post-modern thinkers, Weil suggests that this spirituality may remedy "the lack of balance due to a purely material development of technical science" (NFR 94). In this sense, the retrieval of spiritual resources from the western tradition, and indeed from non-western traditions as well, will instill the modern world with a rootedness sorely lacking. Such spiritual roots will nourish and strengthen a continuity with both the dead

and those yet unborn (NFR 95).⁵

Simone Weil understands the philosophical enterprise to be the formation of a way of life before it is an affair of theory. "Philosophy (including problems of cognition, etc) is *exclusively* an affair of action and practice. That is why it is so difficult to write about it. Difficult in the same way as a treatise on tennis or running, but much more so" (FLNB 362). The subject matter of philosophy (wisdom, justice, good, beauty, and ultimately God for Weil) is incapable of being captured in rational thought and speculation. One must play tennis to learn it, experience music to know it, experience art to understand it, and finally engage in spiritual exercises in order to come to know truth, justice, beauty, love, and God.

The insufficiency of objective and rational knowledge is especially true if, as Weil contends, an awareness of suffering and affliction is the key to wisdom. In this light, a village idiot may possess a greater wisdom by virtue of her suffering than the most intelligent man of talent (MA 67-70). Along these lines, Weil insists that certain people have a privileged contact with the most important knowledge of all: the reality of misfortune (NFR 169). Thus, in the thought of Weil the experience of suffering can give rise to a mystical wisdom. In order to make this fully possible, spiritual exercises of

⁵"But no one thinks nowadays about his ancestors who died fifty or even only twenty or ten years before his birth; nor about his descendents who will be born fifty or even only twenty or ten years after his death" (NFR 95). Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx* trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994) addresses the need to attend to the voices of spirits: of those spirits both dead and unborn. At the heart of this version 'spirituality' is a messianic, eschatological justice calling for attention to non-present spirits. "If I am getting ready to speak at length about ghosts, inheritance, and generations, generations of ghosts, which is to say about certain *others* who are not present, nor presently living, either to us, in us, or outside us, it is in the name of *justice*....It is necessary to speak of the ghost, indeed to the ghost and with it, from the moment that no ethics, no politics, whether revolutionary or not, seems possible and thinkable and just that does not recognize in its principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet there, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born" (xix).

work, detachment, and attention must prepare the spirit for the reception of the divine. While the experience of suffering *per se* is not constitutive of mysticism, it can become a source of mystical insight when attention and awareness is cultivated by spiritual exercises. The need for spiritual exercises and the insight that suffering may engender both imply the limitations of purely objective, rational theory in the search for truth.

Related to this claim, Weil insists that there are two kinds of philosophers: those who construct systems of thought to represent objective reality and those who orient the form of philosophy to provoke a transformation in the students or readers. It is the latter, Weil claims, who are the true masters of thought. They recognize that "philosophic reflection depends on an effort of detachment that goes beyond the intelligence and involves the whole man... 'One must turn toward the truth with one's whole soul'" (FW 288). For Weil this Platonic philosophy results in transformation and conversion. It is a spirituality.

Certainly it should be noted that not all forms of philosophy can be considered spirituality. Indeed, central to the contention of Weil is that the modern world has impoverished the classic understanding of philosophy by separating theory from practice and philosophical questioning from spiritual training. Weil argues that the seeds of such a separation are already present in Aristotle and come to full bloom in modernity. Thus, philosophy can be considered a form of spirituality only if and when the central task of philosophy is to instigate a transformation or conversion in the life of the student. An engagement in the philosophical life will demand a commitment by the entire human

person, body and soul.⁶

On many of these issues, Simone Weil fits in well with the contemporary interest in spirituality and mysticism. The French philosopher Pierre Hadot, for example, is particularly worthy of attention for his singular knowledge of both ancient and modern philosophy. Hadot's insistence that ancient philosophy was a way of life may seem like a platitude, but in fact has radical implications concerning the nature of the philosophical enterprise. Hadot distinguishes between two senses of the word 'discourse':

On the one hand, discourse insofar as it is addressed to a disciple or to oneself, that is to say, the discourse linked to an existential context, to a concrete praxis, discourse that is actually spiritual exercise; on the other hand, discourse considered abstractly in its formal structure, in its intelligible content. It is the latter that the Stoics would consider different from philosophy, but which is precisely what is usually made the object of most of the modern studies of the history of philosophy. But in the eyes of the ancient philosophers, if one contents oneself with this discourse, one does not do philosophy.⁷

Hadot's work makes clear that an objective and purely theoretical philosophical method is the product of the modern scene, a scene dominated by scientific models of thought.

⁶A related issue to the separation of theory and practice is the separation of form and content, as David Tracy has suggested. The aesthetic theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, for example, is exemplary in its challenge of the separation of form and content. In the Platonic tradition, argues von Balthasar, truth or the good is manifested and revealed only through the form of beauty. The epiphany of Beauty enraptures the human subject and draws him outside of himself. The attraction of beauty delights us and moves in the direction of truth and the good. In his work Explorations in Theology: The Word Made Flesh, Vol. 1 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989) von Balthasar puts it this way: "The light of the transcendentals, unity, truth, goodness and beauty, a light at one with the light of philosophy, can only shine if it is undivided....This brings home to us that an apparent enthusiasm for the beautiful is mere idle talk when divorced from the sense of a divine summons to change one's life" (107). Augustine in On Christian Doctrine trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1958) is deeply concerned with the question of form and content especially in relation to the issue of rhetoric. The task of the Christian preacher, Augustine claims, is to teach, delight, and to move (136). In these examples, we can see how the significance of form in the Platonic tradition is related to the understanding of philosophy as a spiritual training which intends to transform, in addition to inform, the student disciple.

⁷See Pierre Hadot, Philosophy as a Way of Life ed. Arnold Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) 26.

For the ancients, on the contrary, philosophy was a form of spiritual exercises "designed to insure spiritual progress toward the ideal state of wisdom, exercises of reason that will be, for the soul, analogous to the athlete's training or to the application of a medical cure".⁸ This analogy concerning physical exercises in the Greek *gymnasion* suggests that philosophical training was a kind of spiritual gymnastics. Philosophical works were constructed with the primary intention of training and *forming* rather than simply *informing* the philosophical disciple.⁹ Equally interesting about the claim of Hadot is that the significance of spiritual exercises is related to the limitations of language and thought. The use of irony by Socrates, for example, is an attempt to highlight the limited and fragile character of human knowledge.¹⁰ Socrates, after all, claims that he knows nothing. Recognition of one's ignorance, of our situation in the cave, is the beginning of wisdom. Questions concerning good, justice, beauty, and love, therefore, cannot be isolated from the search for and contact with these realities. Hadot quotes Socrates in Xenophon's Memoirs of Socrates as saying: "If I don't reveal my views on justice in words, I do so by my conduct." Hadot explains that what Socrates wants to convey is that "we can never understand justice if we do not live it."¹¹ For Simone Weil, the answer is put in a similar way but in relation to Christ. "What is this justice? How can the imitation of God by a man be possible? We have an answer. That answer is Christ"

⁸ibid, 59.

⁹ibid, 64.

¹⁰ibid, 156-57.

¹¹ibid, 155.

(ICAG 79). As we will see later, the imitation of Christ at the cross, especially in relation to labor, is the bridge to justice and truth in the mystical thought of Weil. To understand one must be engaged; practice brings understanding; work brings wisdom.

If we understand the task of philosophy in this sense, (as a way of life and a spiritual discipline at odds with objective and detached scientific models of thought), we can begin to appreciate the thought of Weil in relation to a wide variety of modern, or rather post-modern, thinkers.¹² What this brief discussion of Hadot is meant to suggest is simply that the ancient philosophers sought to cultivate an attention and thoughtfulness that is formed by spiritual practices and ways of living. Implicit in this Greek philosophical tradition, though not fully developed as with the later apophatic tradition, is the intimation of the limitations of language and objective thought in the face of the mystery of life. While much of western apophatic language has its roots in Plato, however, it is only fully developed in later Platonism and in Christian mysticism. In the mysticism of Weil, the form of life and spiritual exercises inherent to her apophatic mystical vision are grounded in the mystery of God, especially of the suffering God of the cross.

As is well known, Christianity, in general, and Christian mysticism, in particular, were deeply shaped by Greek beliefs, practices, and thought. One of the first Christian

¹²Many of the so-called post-modern thinkers share an interest in the limitations of objective and theoretical knowledge and language. Heidegger, for example, insists that the thinking of Being cannot proceed by objective and detached theory. He contrasts the objective theoretical attitude of metaphysics and especially modern scientific and technological thought as a presence-at-hand (*vorhandenheit*) with a knowledge that proceeds by involvement, engagement, participation, and practice, namely, readiness-to-hand (*zuhandenheit*). Knowing in this latter case is similar to learning how to use tools: one learns by cultivating the skill by practice. George Steiner writes of Heidegger that he sought to recapture what was for the early Greeks an experiencing and living of Being. The early Greek philosophers lived the question of Being in the face of the wonder and astonishment of Being. The piety of their questioning sought to prepare, not for an answer to the question of Being, but rather for a reception of and response to the epiphany and illumination of Being. See George Steiner, *Martin Heidegger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) 52-53, 27-29, 35, 65.

mystical thinkers, Origen, deeply incorporates the Greek notion of philosophy as training or 'paideia'. Training occurs in the three areas of ethics, physics, and mystical theology. Hadot explains: "Ethics corresponds to initial purification, physics to definitive detachment from the sensible world and contemplation of the order of nature; finally, theology corresponds to contemplation of the principle of all things."¹³ For the early Christian thinkers, however, the acceptance of Greek 'paideia' was possible with one major caveat: the training of the Christian philosopher must be determined by the witness to the incarnated Logos in the scriptures. In the thought of Origen, therefore, the book of Proverbs is to teach us about ethics; Ecclesiastes is the handbook for physics; and the Song of Songs is the guide in mystical theology for the mature Christian.¹⁴

The suggestion that mysticism is a way of life in the face of Divine mystery is a vision which, Weil would argue, is shared by the spirituality of the ancient Greek thinkers, especially Plato. With Weil's growing Christian faith, however, her understanding of mysticism takes on new characteristics related to a theology of the cross. This transformation of the Greek tradition by a central metaphor of Christianity--Christ Crucified--is the foundation for her development of a mysticism of work. Work is a daily death, a bearing of the cross. The absence of the idea of work among the Greeks, according to Weil, amounts to a failure to ground spirituality in a concrete,

¹³Pierre Hadot, *op.cit.*, 137.

¹⁴See Origen's prologue to his Commentary on the Song of Songs trans. Rowan Greer (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) 232. For the thought of Weil, as we will see in the next chapter, the use of Ecclesiastes or Job is appropriated in a similar manner; namely, as a text which detaches us by an awareness of the void and nothingness of creation, on the one hand, and will enable us, through this detachment, to re-establish our pact with the cosmos, on the other.

historical praxis (such as work). It is with Weil's developing Christian belief that God is manifested within history, on the underside of history to be exact, that her mysticism departs from the Greek tradition of philosophy and spirituality. The departure is even more radical from the Greeks if one considers that for Simone Weil the cross is manifested not merely in a personal manner, but in the faces of the whole groups of afflicted and oppressed persons, such as factory workers or colonized peoples. It is this moment which adds a more Christian character to the general understanding of mysticism (here the same as 'spirituality') as a 'way of life in the face of Divine mystery'.

In addition to the importance of 'Christ Crucified', the second element in the thought of Weil which distinguishes her mystical vision from Greek spirituality is the apophatic moment of her thought. In the history of the Christian tradition, apophatic theology is an integral part of mysticism. Denys Turner maintains that this fact should not be minimized. Apophatic theology, Turner explains, is "that speech about God which is the failure of speech."¹⁵ This failure of speech pertains not merely to the limitations of language in the face of Divine mystery, but also to the failure of language in reference to the human self. "And if, in my deepest inwardness, I and God meet in a union beyond description and beyond experience, then an apophaticism of language about God and an apophaticism of language about the 'self' are obviously intimately connected."¹⁶ In the theology of Eckhart, for example, not only is God free of all names, but so is the 'spark' of the human soul. "It is free of all names, it is bare of all forms, wholly empty and free,

¹⁵See Denys Turner, The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 20.

¹⁶ibid. 6.

as God in himself is empty and free."¹⁷ Turner sums up his understanding of mysticism by stating that "in the classical traditions of the Middle Ages, that apophatic element is an essential, not an optional, constituent of theology *as such*, the apophatic may be said to constitute the 'mystical element' in all theology."¹⁸

As we will see later in this chapter as well as in chapter three, Simone Weil appropriates such apophatic discourse. The limitations of conceptual knowing pertain both to her understanding of God and the mystery of the self. The annihilation of the self in Weil, for instance, is not simply a negation of the self, but rather a negation of negation of all attempts to fully comprehend the depths of the human person. In other words, the annihilated, decreeted self is distinguished from a literal destruction of the self. Finally, it is important to note in continuity with much of the tradition that Weil's apophatic discourse (a term she herself does not use) is intimately linked with the praxis of the apophatic. In other words, the practice of detachment is both a critique of literal conceptual language and a way of life which is the purification of the desires of the will and ego. In reference to Eckhart, Turner says: "'Detachment', in short, is the ascetical practice of the apophatic."¹⁹ As this chapter hopes to show, work in the thought of Weil is a central ascetical practice of the apophatic.

In addition to this apophatic element, a further clarification of the meaning of

¹⁷See Meister Eckhart, German Sermons, Sermon 2 in Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense trans. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1981) 180.

¹⁸Denys Turner, *op.cit.*, 265.

¹⁹*ibid.* 179,271.

mysticism in the thought of Weil is in order. The scholarship of Bernard McGinn, discussed in chapter one, has contributed much to our understanding of mysticism in the Christian tradition. In this chapter I will not return to explain in detail the debates concerning mysticism. Let it suffice to recall McGinn's important suggestion that mysticism should be explained in relation to three headings: "mysticism as a part or element of religion; mysticism as a process or way of life; and mysticism as an attempt to express a direct consciousness of the presence of God."²⁰ Thus far in this chapter I have suggested that spirituality in the thought of Weil is a more general term than mysticism and is an entire discipline of training and a way of life. I have suggested that it has parallels with philosophical discussions among the ancient Greeks. In this sense, Weil's interest in Plato and the Stoics brings her into close contact with Hadot's interpretation of ancient philosophy.

In relation to the above headings of McGinn, I contend that spirituality in the thought of Weil should be interpreted in relation to the first two more general headings, but that in regards to the third heading ("mysticism as an attempt to express a direct consciousness of the presence of God") we would be more precise in calling this, in particular, the mystical element in Weil's thought. Of course, mysticism certainly includes the first two elements as well, but more specifically can be defined, in McGinn's work, as the "preparation for, consciousness of, and reaction to...the immediate or direct presence of God."²¹ This distinction between spirituality and mysticism is meant to be only a helpful

²⁰See Bernard McGinn, The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century (New York: Crossroad, 1991) xv-xvi.

²¹ibid, xvii.

distinction and not a separation; clearly they cannot be separated in the history of the Christianity. Thus, while the first two elements of McGinn's interpretation of mysticism are characteristic of all spirituality, the third element is distinctive of a spirituality that becomes mystical. For Simone Weil, then, philosophical schools can be understood to be forms of spirituality when and insofar as they are concerned with ultimate value, transcendence, and a new way of life. Mysticism, on the other hand, only emerges with a more immediate and direct consciousness of God that, in the thought of Weil, is inextricably linked to a Christian understanding of the Divine.

In the her own maturing consciousness of God's presence, Weil detected a transformation in her life. After her mystical contacts, Weil explains that the "name of God and Christ have been more and more irresistibly mingled with my thoughts" (SL 140). Prior to that time she was closer to the thought of the Greeks, and to Hadot one might say. "Until then my only faith had been the Stoic *amor fati* as Marcus Aurelius had understood it..." (SL 140). In other words, Weil's understanding of philosophy had from an early point in her life been determined by a spirituality. Her deepening Christian faith takes her more and more in the direction of mysticism that, to be sure, incorporates the Greek philosophical and spiritual tradition, but also transforms it in relation to a Christian theology of the cross as well as in the direction of apophatic discourse.

In fact, Weil does not hesitate to speak of her own contacts with God in explicitly Christian terms. In no uncertain words she says that Christ came down and took possession of her (WFG 69). She likens this encounter to the presence of a love, "like that which one can read in the smile on a beloved face" (WFG 69). It is important to

note that this event occurred while in the midst of violent headaches that Weil often suffered. These moments of beauty and revelation happened while she endured pain and affliction. The manifestation of Christ in her life had the effect of heightening her consciousness of God in a more immediate and explicit manner and, no doubt, of giving her a more profound sense of the solidarity of the suffering, crucified God with the afflicted. For in her view, God is most inclined to manifest himself to the outcasts and rejects; to those who lack power, glory, and majesty (WFG 72).

Concerning the question of mysticism in the thought of Weil, however, we need to consider more than her autobiographical accounts. Her reflections on mysticism, I contend, reveal parallels with the helpful definition by McGinn mentioned above. While any definition of mysticism will be inadequate, especially for a tradition which insists that all language falls short of the ineffable and indefinable divine mystery, nevertheless, philosophy and theology must speak, even if to reveal the inadequacy and failure of speech. Thus, Simone Weil insists that a method is necessary for the study of mysticism. "The supreme and perfect state of mystical contemplation is something that is infinitely more mysterious still, and yet St. John of the Cross wrote treatises on the method of attaining to such a state..." (NFR 180). Her contention in this case is that mysticism is not an arbitrary or magical state of experience. If this is what constitutes mysticism, as we will see later, she was hostile toward 'mysticism'. As she explains in her spiritual autobiography, she had been "put off" by accounts of miracles and special states that ostensibly described the experience of God (WFG 69). To define mysticism as a feeling or experience is to run the risk of reducing mysticism to a sentimental and consoling

opiate. As such mysticism will be indistinguishable, Weil argues, from the experience of the effects of a drug. "The mistake lies precisely in the search for a particular state" (WFG 173). Weil names this kind of mysticism an 'ersatz' or substitute/false mysticism. This suspicion toward the association of mysticism with special states or extraordinary experiences is related to the suspicion Weil expresses toward the belief in miracles. Concerning Jesus, for example, she insists that miracles in his life were ambiguous and neutral in themselves. Other false prophets are seen to possess powers to perform signs and wonders, so miracles are an inadequate sign of the presence of God. It was not the miracles of Jesus that were revealing of his authenticity, but instead the extraordinary quality of his entire life: the poverty and purity of his life, his compassion, the beauty of his words (NFR 256).

Along similar lines, Weil states that there are two kinds of figures in the history of mysticism: "There are people who simply experience states of ecstasy; there are other people who devote themselves almost exclusively to the study of these states, who describe and classify them and, so far as it is possible, induce them" (SL 123). Weil then suggests that it is the latter who have been generally considered mystics! The title of 'mystic' is improperly imputed only on the basis of an extraordinary state of experience.

This claim, I believe, agrees with much of contemporary scholarship on mysticism. As contemporary scholars have pointed out, many mystical thinkers of the Christian tradition have abstained from providing the readers with autobiographical accounts concerning experiences of the divine. As we saw in chapter one, such a focus on autobiographical descriptions of experience has led to a neglect of a hermeneutics of

mystical texts.²² Of course, the presence of autobiographical accounts does not disqualify one as a mystic. If this is true then neither Bernard of Clairvaux, Theresa of Avila, and Simone Weil would be considered mystics. What I am insisting upon, nevertheless, is that special experiences as such do not constitute mysticism. As we will see in the next chapter, Simone Weil, John of the Cross, and Meister Eckhart are three mystical thinkers who would agree that experience itself can be deceptive and is an insufficient, even dangerous, feature to define as 'mysticism'.

The problem with this reduction of mysticism to a feeling or experience is that it obscures the significance of the spiritual exercises and practices as 'preparation for' (the consciousness of God) as well as overlooking the life lived as a reaction to the consciousness of God. The entire process of the mystical life is thereby given slight attention.²³ As we will see in the third section of this chapter, for Weil spiritual exercises are crucial for preparing for the reception of divine grace or inspiration. Equally important, however, is the way of life following upon a vision of God, the 'return to the cave' of the transformed person (LP 221).

In her essay "Forms of the Implicit Love of God", for example, she claims that love of neighbor, love of the beauty of the world, love of religious ceremonies, and friendship are all ways to prepare for the presence of God. "The combination of these loves constitutes the love of God in the form best suited to the preparatory period, that is to say

²²In McGinn's words, "The emphasis on mystical experience has led not only to a neglect of mystical hermeneutics but also to an emphasis on first-person, autobiographical accounts of special visionary or unitive experiences of God. First-person accounts are rare in the first millennium of Christian mysticism..." (ibid, xiv).

²³In McGinn's words, "Isolation of the goal from the process and the effect has led to much misunderstanding of the nature of mysticism..." (ibid, xvi).

a veiled form. They do not disappear when the love of God in the full sense of the word wells up in the soul; they become infinitely stronger and all loves taken together make only a single love" (WFG 138). The cultivation of these implicit, preparatory loves involves a kind of apprenticeship or spiritual training closely linked with her understanding of mysticism. In this case, note, it is *love* not any kind of *feeling* that constitutes mysticism per se.

In McGinn's definition of mysticism, his choice of the term 'consciousness' in lieu of 'experience' or 'feeling' is, I agree, more faithful to the Christian mystical tradition and to Simone Weil. In the Christian Platonism of Weil, the key moment of transformation or turning of the soul is a renewed consciousness or awareness. Through Platonic images Weil suggests that consciousness of our blind and ignorant situation in the cave (our exile) is the beginning of our movement toward the light of the sun. "We are unconscious of our misery" and unaware of our blindness and misery inside the cave (SNLG 109). This insight into our exiled state takes on a more explicit Christian meaning in her association of human exile with the fall in Genesis and the concomitant curse of Adam and Eve with regard to the pain of labor (NFR 285-86). Weil interprets this sense of exile in Plato (and Greek tragedy) vis-a-vis a theology of the cross and in relation to the pain of work. In a concrete manner, work heightens our consciousness of our exile, namely, our subjection to time, suffering, monotony, cross. I would suggest that this aspect of her thought is a dialectical consciousness.²⁴

²⁴See chapter one for an explanation of dialectical thought. To briefly summarize, I have found that David Tracy's model of proclamation is illuminating of dialectical thought. Here the sense of non-identity and non-participation between the human person and the cosmos predominates. An understanding of the misery and exiled character of human nature is primary.

The consciousness of God thus begins with the consciousness of our misery and blindness (not unlike Luther). Yet in the vision of Weil this is the beginning of the mystical life not the culmination. Again following Plato, but relating it to her own notion of attention, Weil claims that the consciousness of God needs further training and illumination. The ascent of the soul outside the cave is cultivated by: 1) mathematical and scientific exercises, 2) philosophical dialectics, 3) apprenticeship in beauty, 4) ethical exercises, and 5) contemplation or vision of God. Weil argues that the culminating point of contemplation (*theoria*) is a transcendence or transgression of pure intellectual theory: it is love. "Sight is then the faculty which is in relationship with the good. Plato, in the *Symposium*, says as definitely as possible that this faculty is love. By the eyes, by sight, Plato means love" (ICAG 134). Love thus makes possible a consciousness of God that is both a vision of and assimilation to God (ICAG 77). This renewed consciousness brings a new knowledge of the self, neighbor, cosmos, and God. I am suggesting that this is an analogical consciousness in Weil's thought.²⁵

Weil also uses the formula of 'descent, ascent, and re-descent' to describe the journey of the soul in the mystical life. First and foremost, the descent is an imitation of the kenotic, self-emptying God incarnated and crucified in Jesus Christ.²⁶ The descent

²⁵See chapter one for my development of analogical thought in relation to David Tracy's model of manifestation. In this case, a feeling of belonging and union with the cosmos and God overcomes the sense of exile. The manifestation of love and beauty redeems human existence and leads to an affirmation in the worthwhileness of history and nature.

²⁶Andrew Louth explains the importance of descent for the Christian mysticism. While Platonism depicts the soul's search for God in terms of ascent, Christianity insists that God's descent into human flesh (Incarnation) is indispensable for making possible human communion with God. See his Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) xiv.

corresponds to the embrace of the finite, limited, fragile, and historical character of human existence. It is an awareness of and consent to pain and suffering; that is, the descent is our bearing of the cross. A mystical ascent which seeks to ascend from the world by fleeing time, death, and suffering is another form of a false mysticism. "To escape from time--that is a sin" (NB 28). This form of false mysticism pretends to flee from our exiled and historical existence in order to evade the dark face of reality. For Weil, the Christian virtue of humility is central to the meaning of mystical descent; humility is, first and foremost, a recognition of human misery and human limitation in time and space (NB 235). The best example of the descent into time is the consent to necessity via human labor (NB 269). Labor makes obvious our subjection to time and is a "daily death" (NFR 286-87). Thus a "descending movement is a condition precedent to an ascending movement" (NFR 221).

To summarize thus far: the aspect of preparation for the consciousness of God in Simone Weil involves two major aspects. First of all, mystical descent is an acceptance of our subjection to time, necessity, suffering and human labor; it is an awareness of the nothingness (void) of creation and the finitude and fragility of human life. In ideal cases it leads to decreation, although where force is most brutal and cold it may lead to destruction. It is this aspect of Weil's mystical vision that exemplifies a dialectical character. Second, following upon this recognition of our exile, attention becomes crucial and involves intellectual, aesthetical, and ethical spiritual exercises. The ascent via attention occurs, finally, by a letting-go of the active and controlling will; that is, it occurs through desire and love. To use a Platonic image, it is love which makes our wings grow

(SNLG 117, 122). It is this aspect of Weil's mystical vision that exemplifies an analogical character.

In the thought of Weil, work is especially related to a dialectical consciousness. As a concrete practice of descent, it is the condition for the ascending moment of the analogical vision in Weil. Since Weil's thoughts on work are at the heart of this chapter a developed analysis of the analogical moment of her mystical thought (e.g. attention, contemplation, love) will have to wait till next chapter.

Finally, the development of a mysticism of work by Simone Weil challenges the separation of sacred and profane spheres of culture and society. Spirituality in the modern age has the task, Weil creatively suggests, of cultivating a form of "life in which the supernatural truths would be read in every kind of work, in every act of labor, in all festivals, in all hierarchical social relations, in all art, in all science, in all philosophy" (FLNB 173). A spirituality that speaks to our age should not seek to exacerbate the separation of religion from secular and public life, but rather imbue it and transform it with its spirit. As we will see in this chapter, the relationship of mysticism to work is at the heart of such a transformation (not annulment) of secular life. Thus a peasant working in the fields or a worker in the factory may be as prayerful as a monk in his cell, Weil contends.²⁷

The association of mysticism with the destructive and enriching possibilities of work in the thought of Simone Weil is novel. The understanding of mysticism as, in general, a way of life, and more specifically, "preparation for, consciousness of, and reaction

²⁷See J.P. Little, Simone Weil: Waiting on Truth (New York: Berg Publishers, 1988) 115.

to...the immediate or direct presence of God", on the one hand, and an apophatic discourse, on the other, challenges the following misconceptions fostered by the modern world: the reduction of mysticism to mere private experiences or states of the soul; the separation of the sacred and profane; and the separation of theory and practice. Such criticisms are certainly not original to Weil, but she takes these critiques in a new direction with regards to work and force.

Weil's criticism echoes that of previous mystics, even when she does not explicitly note them. Meister Eckhart, for example, states: "Because truly, when people think that they are acquiring God in inwardness, in devotion, in sweetness and in various approaches than they do by the fireside or in the stable, you are acting just as if you took God and muffled his head up in a cloak and pushed him under a bench."²⁸ This quote sums up well both a critique of mysticism as a private, inward experience or sweetness as well as the caricature of mysticism as a form of religion separate and isolated from the public and 'profane' world. Eckhart was part of a general trend in the late Middle Ages of movements of mysticism and spirituality away from the monasteries and the Latin language toward lay people and vernacular languages, including women. Simone Weil continues in this tradition and takes it in a new direction, especially in regards to work.

Now we are in a position to turn and consider in depth Weil's reflections on work. It is through this association of work and mysticism that Weil is particularly innovative. Her heightened awareness of the oppressed and afflicted of society lends to the mysticism of Weil a realism which faces the dark and destructive domination of force in history and

²⁸Meister Eckhart, *German Sermons*, Sermon 5b, trans. Colledge and McGinn, op.cit., 183.

society. From war and conquest to the modern factory, Weil is untiring in her refusal to flee from confronting suffering and evil. This fact makes the mysticism of Weil that much more serious and persuasive. As we will see, work is not merely an obstacle to the mystical life, but can also become, with the right training and attention, a bridge to a transforming consciousness of God.

The Accessibility of Mysticism

I say yet more, do not be startled, for this joy is near you and is in you. There is no one of you so crude, or so small in understanding or so removed, that he cannot joyfully and intelligently find this joy within him in the truth in which it exists, even before you leave this church today or before I finish the sermon today. He can as truly find it and live it and possess it within him as God is God and I am a man.²⁹

In the late Middle Ages there was a wide variety of lay movements writing in the vernacular which were critical of the monopoly of theology and spirituality at the hands of the educated and Latin-literate 'religious'. New lay groups from non-aristocratic origins erupted into prominence reacting against the elitism and arid speculation of much of the scholastic thought of the period. In addition to these criticisms, the denunciation of the separation of theology from spirituality gained widespread support in the popular lay movements of the time.³⁰ Eckhart, in particular, is extraordinary in his openness to

²⁹German Works, Sermon 66. Quoted by Bernard McGinn in his "Theological Summary" in Meister Eckhart, op.cit., 61.

³⁰Consider the Beguines who were initially pious lay women practicing poverty and chastity while still maintaining occupations in the 'world'. The popular lay movement of the 'Modern Devotion' was also a late medieval trend reacting against the elitism and speculative scholasticism of the period. The founder of the movement, Gerard Groote, intended on keeping religion simple and directed toward prayer and charity. The work of Thomas a Kempis's Imitation of Christ articulates many of the anti-intellectual views shared by the spirit of the Modern Devotion. We can understand this position as a reaction against the separation of theology and spirituality fostered by much of the scholasticism of the time. Another theologian, Jean Gerson, will claim that

the common and uneducated hearers of his sermons. In an interesting reading, Michael Sells explains that one may interpret Eckhart's understanding of living 'without medium' as without money.³¹ The true freedom and nobility of the soul is at odds with the aristocratic nobility of society and culture. "The nobility beyond means is identified with the common, with those who have nothing and are equal to nothing."³² In Eckhart, the noble and free soul is the just person, she who, by virtue of her just and detached life, is not only equal to man but equal to God.³³ Finally, with the humility of God made flesh as the example, Eckhart insists that one's familial lineage should not be a source of shame nor pride. The humble descent of God into flesh "strikes at the pride of all those who when asked about their relatives respond by pointing to one who holds an important position, but are silent about their own descent...There is the story of the mule who when asked who his father was answered that his uncle was a thoroughbred, but out of shame hid the fact that his father was an ass."³⁴ Eckhart is exemplary in making clear the accessibility of mysticism to all, including those who are common, poor, and whose lineage may have more asses than thoroughbreds.

In a similar vein, Simone Weil maintains that mysticism is not only accessible to

unlike scholastic theology, mystical theology is more democratic. In his words, "even young girls and simple people (*idiotae*)" can become experts in mystical theology since love and personal experience are more important than university training. Quote taken from Steven Ozment The Age of Reform: 1250-1550 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) 74.

³¹Michael Sells, Mystical Languages of Unsayings (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) 194.

³²ibid.

³³Meister Eckhart, German Sermons, Sermon 6, tran. Colledge and McGinn, op.cit., 187.

³⁴Latin Works, Commentary on John, Chapter 1.116 in Meister Eckhart, op.cit., 167.

the poor and afflicted, but that they even have a privileged insight or vision (*theoria*). Contemplatives or mystics, philosophers, and scholars run the risk of losing contact with real, conflictual, and concrete history, Weil argues. Work makes it impossible to do so. "He who is aching in every limb, worn out by the effort of a day of work, that is to say a day when he has been subject to matter, bears the reality of the universe in his flesh like a thorn. The difficulty for him is to look and to love. If he succeeds, he loves the Real. That is the immense privilege God has reserved for his poor" (WFG 170). Workers and the afflicted can have, if their attention is vigilant, a more truthful and un-sentimental vision of the painful reality of suffering and cross in history and nature.

I would like to examine some philosophical suggestions of Weil concerning this claim on behalf of the working poor and the afflicted. For Weil, it is not that the working poor are necessarily more ethical than other more privileged classes. What is at issue is their cognitive insight into reality brought to light by their suffering. In Weil, this position is due to the fact that the cross is the supreme source of wisdom. "The Cross of Christ is the only gateway to knowledge" (NB 444). This knowledge born of suffering is central to her reading of Greek tragedy (ICAG 56-59). What does one learn by suffering? The wisdom that grace brings violently (Aeschylus) teaches us of our dependency, limits, fragility (ICAG).

The insights inspired by her reading of tragedy take on a more forceful reality in her own experience of factory work. The purpose of her factory work was, in addition to her desire to be in solidarity with the working classes, to deepen her knowledge and to continue her studies. Simone Petremont mentions that Weil had reached an impasse in

her theoretical thought. The time of factory work was to bring clarification and illumination on the social, political, and economic issues of the time.³⁵ This was to lead to a solution that would inspire change and the alleviation of social oppression. Thus the time of factory work was not simply a question of experience for Weil but rather, in keeping with our understanding of mysticism, an opportunity to cultivate a consciousness and awareness of society and humanity. Evident in the appreciation of Weil toward the working classes and the afflicted, therefore, is an eagerness to learn from their struggle and plight.

This appreciation for the potential wisdom inherent in the marginalized groups of society has a philosophical foundation in the thought of Weil. In the early writing of Simone Weil it is already clear that she claims that truth is accessible to all, not merely to an elite class. "Thus any man, however mediocre his intelligence and talents may be, can, if he applies himself, know everything that is within man's reach..." (FW 48, WFG 64). This quote from her thesis on Descartes has as its target the scientific knowledge of the modern world. She complains that science shows a confident scorn for the intuition of the common person (FW 32-34). The authority of science reigns unchallenged in its monopoly of what will count as knowledge. The norms of valid knowledge promulgated by science are hostile to ordinary thought.

Simone found an ally in the defense of ordinary intuition with the idea of perception. Perception is an act of natural geometry that contains an act of reasoning at a pre-conceptual level (FW 53-54). Perception is not simply a passive reception of sensations,

³⁵Simone Petremont Simone Weil: A Life (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976) 204-06.

as empiricism assumes. Sensations, in fact, are nothing in themselves. The world of sensations and experience is mediated by a natural geometry or act of reasoning (FW 69). As she says in her Lectures on Philosophy: Perception forms "necessary connections" which are the "conditions of experience; they give to it the form without which experience would only be a mass of sensations" (LP 113, 102). Space, depth, shape, and time: all are given to us by an implicit act of the mind. She sums up this perspective by suggesting that perception is a sort of dance. "Perception of nature, pure and simple, is a sort of dance; it is this dance that makes perception possible for us" (FW 52). Each of my bodily movements and actions is a geometrical dance, she says. The world is ordered through this implicit geometrical action.³⁶

Tools, for example, are extensions of this geometrical bodily action. The use of tools extends the reach of my body to give form and order to the world. In actual work I am practicing geometry. This practice of geometry is a real knowledge. "Actual work is related to knowledge insofar as it explores the world..." (FW 82). It is a knowledge by doing and praxis. "The pilot who holds the tiller in a storm, the peasant who swings his scythe, knows himself and knows the world in a way meant by the statement 'I think, therefore I am'..." (FW 85). Thus, implicit in the act of perception and work is a form of knowledge equal to the conceptual consciousness of Descartes! In Weil's thesis on Descartes, she gives a creative interpretation of perception and work. In her later work she will relate this understanding of perception and work to her reading of the notion

³⁶For a very helpful interpretation of Weil in relation to perception see Peter Winch, Simone Weil: The Just Balance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) especially chapters 2-4.

critique.³⁷

In Simone Weil this appreciation for the 'insight' implicit in work warrants the necessity of critique. "There is no way of opening broad vistas which the mind can observe without entering them. One must enter the subject before one can see anything. This is also true of speculation, even in its purest form...Whence the necessity and the role of *critique*" (FLNB 24). This idea of critique suggests that all knowledge, including speculation, is formed by a particular involvement, concern, or use. There is no disinterested knowledge. The significance of this recognition will lead Weil in the direction of Marx. For Weil, then, critique should be brought to bear on socio-political and economic issues such as oppression, war, conquest, etc..

The position of Simone Weil regarding the implicit vision inherent to action leads her to challenge the dominance of scientific norms of knowledge and their disparaging attitudes toward the common person, especially the workers. For Simone Weil the most helpful role that science can now play is to help cultivate the mind and attention of the

³⁷The idea of Heidegger's 'readiness-to-hand' (zuhandenheit) bears a close resemblance to these reflections of Weil on work. Readiness-to-hand is a form of knowledge only possible through involvement, participation, and praxis. It is a knowledge born in a way analogous to the use of tools--by practice. It is contrasted with the detached and objective theory of metaphysics and, especially, of modern science and technology, namely, presence-at-hand (vorhandenheit). "No matter how sharply we just *look* at the 'outward appearance' of Things in whatever form this takes, we cannot discover anything ready-to-hand. If we look at Things just 'theoretically', we can get along without understanding readiness-to-hand. But when we deal with them by using them and manipulating them, this activity is not a blind one; it has its own kind of sight, by which our manipulation is guided and from which it acquires its specific Thingly character...'Practical' behavior is not 'atheoretical' in the sense of 'sightlessness'." See *Being and Time* trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962). There is a kind of sight implicit in the involvement with Things as 'ready-to-hand'. The contrast between theory and action is ill-conceived if they are thought of as two mutually exclusive realms. Both are implicated in each other. The result of this in both Weil and Heidegger is a disruption of the Greek order which sets contemplation above the manual worker or craftsman. The Greeks wrongly disparaged and neglected the significance of work, argues Weil. It was thought to be of a servile nature relative to contemplation (NFR 283). The possibility that a philosopher may learn from a worker or slave was a thought not seriously entertained by the Greek philosophers.

workers to recognize the wisdom that is in their possession (FW 86). Too often this wisdom remains only implicit and unrecognized and, even worse, is virtually destroyed under brutal and oppressive conditions of work. As we will see in chapter three, in Weil's later work, a mystical vision comes to dominate the task of consciousness raising. The task of cultivating an explicit awareness and attention of the workers is the purpose of spiritual exercises.

This understanding of praxis (theory and practice) is important to Weil and makes truth accessible to ordinary, uneducated people. This implies that in actual work what is involved is not merely a "sight" in an intellectual sense, but also a vision as *theoria* in the Platonic sense. In other words, the "sight" or vision that is implicit in the act of work gives rise, in the thought of Weil, to a mysticism of work. The workers bear within them the wisdom that may blossom, with proper attention and spiritual training, into a mystical consciousness of God. This is especially true because, for Weil, the beginning of mystical consciousness is an acceptance of our state of exile, of human misery, finitude, and fragility. For Simone Weil it is the common person, especially the workers, the poor and afflicted, who are in the best position to recognize this.

Work as Limit of and Possibility for Mysticism

"The suffering which degrades and that which ennobles are not the same" (NB 79). While Simone Weil interprets the suffering and pain involved in human work to be an inescapable consequence of our natural state of exile, there are certain forms of oppression and exploitation which are abnormally destructive. In the former case,

confronting suffering is interpreted by Weil as a heroic overcoming of adversity that engenders wisdom, whereas in the latter case, suffering has the power to actually crush the human spirit of any impulse of resistance and decimate any knowledge. Weil locates the idea of affliction in the context of the degrading, not ennobling, effect of suffering. Extreme affliction brings death to the self before the self is capable of attentively consenting to its own decreation. The different forms of suffering lead, then, to either a nihilistic annihilation of the self, on the one hand, or to an annihilation in God, on the other. "Just as there are two voids, two silences, etc, the one above and the one below-- so perhaps also, if death is annihilation, there are two annihilations, annihilation in nothingness and annihilation in God" (NB 463).

Weil's thoughts on affliction are shaped by her interpretation of Greek tragedy and the Christian passion narratives. In her interpretation of the passion narratives, for example, she insists that unlike the heroic deaths of the Christian martyrs (often in emulation of a Greek hero, e.g., Socrates), Jesus trembled in the garden prior to his death and at the cross cried out in agony and loneliness. "The accounts of the Passion show that a divine spirit, incarnate, is changed by misfortune, trembles before suffering and death, feels itself, in the depths of its agony, to be cut off from man and God" (MA 192). In Weil's interpretation of the passion narratives, the humanity of Christ makes evident the fragile and vulnerable character of human nature in general. No account of suffering which obscures the weakness of the human spirit in the face of force and oppression will be able to shed light on the human condition. Even a Stoic who had to endure the

oppressive conditions of the modern factory would be degraded, Weil remarks! (SL 38).³⁸

The differences between these two forms of suffering lead, then, to either decreation or destruction. In the case of decreation, suffering is the path to the loss of the self and the discovery of another agent deep within the self--God. In the case of destruction, the self is lost without any such breakthrough. "Suffering is to move either towards the Nothingness above or the Nothingness below" (FLNB 117; also 142, 220, 310, 339). In terms of work, Weil suggests a similar contrast, as with her image of a squirrel revolving in its cage. Akin to an animal, we work to eat, and eat to work. This cycle can be either supreme wretchedness or supreme splendor (NB 496). Elsewhere Weil contrasts a base, servile humility or waiting (humiliation) with a Christ-like humility (NFR 135). In the factory, the worker is made to wait for orders in the former sense. It breeds a humiliating passivity and absence of thought and initiative (FLNB 20).

Work, or suffering in general, can be either an obstacle (limit of) or bridge (possibility for) mysticism. What is the key for fostering the latter, one might ask? For Weil, the answer to that question begins with the actual struggle against oppressive conditions themselves. This struggle for just conditions is a condition for the possibility of mysticism. Of course, the struggle for justice, in itself, does not constitute mysticism anymore than human deeds constitute salvation. There is a tension between the demand

³⁸Weil reads Stoicism as a heroic affirmation of necessity in the face of suffering (*amor fati*). The Stoics, in her view, failed to fully account for the destructive and degrading effect of affliction in human life. It seems to me that Nietzsche shares this perspective of the Stoics, as is evident in his famous quote, "What does not kill me makes me better." For a comparison of Nietzsche and the Stoics see Martha Nussbaum, "Pity and Mercy: Nietzsche's Stoicism," in R. Schacht, ed., *Nietzsche. Genealogy, Morality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

for just conditions of work and the fact that mystical insight occurs as a result of the free and unmerited manifestation of God. In fact, for Weil, the development of the mind, spirit and attention among the workers is more central to mysticism *per se* and this, as well, involves both an active and a passive dimension (see chapter three). In the thought of Weil, the necessity of an active dimension addresses the importance of the *consent* of workers or afflicted. Such a consent makes possible mystical decreation as opposed to the destruction of the self. Decreation of the 'I' happens from within, while destruction occurs from without (NB 337, 342). The model for this consent to decreation is the cross of Christ, as we will see. Because of Weil's lucid and tragic recognition of the brutal and de-humanizing impact of force in society, she insists that any mystical thought should begin by a study of oppression. Her own insights regarding social oppression were deeply shaped by her study of the problems in the industrial factory.

Work as Limit of Mysticism

The destructive capacity of affliction became quite clear to her during her work in the factory. Against heroic conceptions of suffering as ennobling, Weil notes the loss of dignity and humanity in the encounter with brute force. Her conception of affliction accentuates the vulnerable and fragile character of the human spirit. Her understanding of human misery should be seen in the light of this human fragility and not simply in terms of human sinfulness. What exactly is affliction for Weil? First of all, affliction takes possession of the soul and brands the soul with the mark of slavery. It is a humiliating degradation of human dignity. Second, affliction includes physical suffering.

Third, affliction is the loss of all social consideration. One's life is seen as an ignominious shame, as with criminals. Lastly, affliction strikes the soul and produces hatred, contempt, disgust and guilt toward one's own self (SNLG 170-75). "There is not real affliction unless the event which has gripped and uprooted a life attacks it, directly or indirectly, in all its parts, social, psychological, and physical" (SNLG 171). The general condition of the afflicted is a sense of God's absence. Thus it is affliction that causes our absence from God. "Men struck down by affliction are at the foot of the Cross, almost at the greatest possible distance from God. It must not be thought that sin is a greater distance" (SNLG 175). Oppressive conditions of work have the power to thrust a human spirit into a state that is the equivalent of death.

One of Weil's major criticisms of Marx is that he never fully understood the debasing reality of affliction. Marx claims that there exists a revolutionary spirit among the proletariat. During Weil's time in the factory, the complete absence of a radical spirit was most striking. "Marx's assertion that the regime would produce its own gravediggers is cruelly contradicted every day; and one wonders, incidentally, how Marx could ever have believed that slavery could produce free men...The truth is that, to quote a famous saying, slavery degrades man to the point of making him love it..." (OL 117). The conditions of the factory engendered submission and docility not revolt (SL 16,35,47,57). Marx underestimated the power of force. He failed fully to recognize the effectiveness and pervasiveness of force and ideological legitimation; that is, the way in which the sentiments and interests of the masters are internalized and appropriated by the slaves. In other words, the scorn and disregard that the masters show for those who obey is

internalized by the slaves and directed against themselves. "The man who obeys, whose movements, pains, pleasures are determined by the word of another, feels himself to be inferior, not by accident, but by nature" (OL 144).

Even if Marx underestimated the debilitating effect of affliction, there was much in Marx which Weil affirmed. Marx's analysis of capitalism was unsurpassed in demonstrating the effects of specialization as well as the separation of theory and work in the factory. The result of specialization placed the task of thought and initiative in the arms of the ruling classes, while the workers were stripped of any self-determination. "The rationalized factory, where a man finds himself shorn, in the interests of a passive mechanism, of everything which makes for initiative, intelligence, knowledge, method, is as it were an image of our present day society" (OL 13). Theoretical culture came to be monopolized by the ruling classes and such culture only legitimized social oppression. "The false conception so formed tends to prolong the duration of the oppression, in so far as it causes this separation between thought and work to seem legitimate" (OL 30, 156). Thus, Weil argues that the factory destroys the thought, creativity, and initiative of the workers. The factory puts the interests of production and material products before the human person. This brings about a subordination of the subject to the object (OL 33). The products come out refined and polished, while the workers come out debased. "In craftsmanship the worker's limbs formed a living machine; in the factory, there is dead machinery which is independent of the worker, of which they are a part like living cogs in a machine" (LP 147). Oppressive conditions of the factory make one into a reified thing. The ability of force to transform one into a thing is at the heart of her later essay

on "The Iliad". There she defines force as "that x that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing" (MA 163). In the factory, it produces a blind and servile passivity in fearful deference to orders from above.

Weil also makes clear that time was an unbearable burden in the factory (FW 225). The pain and suffering of the work seemed to slow down the passing of time. The burdensome character of time in the factory was only exacerbated by the demand for increased speed in production.³⁹ In this light, "time is the most profound and the most tragic subject which human beings can think about...So, there is nothing in us which does not protest against the passage of time, and yet everything, in us, is subject to time" (LP 197-98). During her time in the factory, Weil came into contact with the tragic and onerous face of time. The destructive effect of this experience of time gave her the sense of a bad infinity, not unlike a squirrel revolving in his cage time and time again. The wretched haste demanded of the workers in the factory is without rhythm, grace and dignity (SWR 61). It is a barren monotony ruled by the time-clock, the opposite extreme of the beautiful monotony of a Gregorian chant or the uniform succession of the days and seasons (SWR 69). The bad infinity of the modern factory is a vicious obstacle to a breakthrough to a divine infinity.

The factory uproots and thrusts the human spirit into an exile without fostering a sense of belonging in the world. "Time drags for him and he lives in a perpetual exile. He spends his day in a place where he cannot feel at home" (SWR 62). In Weil's later work, she insists that the sense of belonging in the world is nothing else than a feeling

³⁹See Simone Petremont, *op.cit.*, 244.

for the beauty of the world.⁴⁰ The conditions of the workers, however, produces a "horror of ugliness. The soul that is prevented by circumstances from feeling anything of the beauty of the world, even confusedly...is invaded to its center by a kind of horror" (WFG 168). This horror is the tearing up of our roots from their connection with the infinity of the cosmos (WFG 180).

In short, the factory for Weil is a "festering-ground of evil" (SWR 72). Clearly, the conditions of the modern industrial society are an obstacle to the cultivation of any form of thought, much less that of a mystical consciousness. Thus, a transformation of such conditions is a condition for the possibility of mysticism. "Marx's truly great idea," Weil writes, "is that in human society...nothing takes place otherwise than through material transformations" (OL 45). This transformation demands a thoughtful and reflective social theory. "Only on this condition could political action become something analogous to a form of work..." (OL 60). In this case, social theory joined with practice plays a part in the Weilian understanding of work.⁴¹

One might suggest that such a materialistic study of society was a part of Weil's early work only to be nullified by her deepening Platonic and Christian vision. I believe that it is clearly inappropriate to think so. To be sure, the materialistic understanding of her early work undergoes a transformation. Nevertheless, as late as the year of her death (1943), she was writing on Marx's "indestructible" contribution; namely, the

⁴⁰See Weil's 'Letter to A.W.' in Seventy Letters ed. and trans. Richard Rees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) 124-25 or "Forms of the Implicit Love of God" in Waiting For God trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper and Row, 1951) especially 158-81.

⁴¹In this light, Simone Weil once said of herself that intellectual honesty demands that her thought be open to all ideas, including materialism and atheism (WFG 85).

methodological study of relations of force in society (OL 164). "Here we have an idea of genius...It is not a doctrine; it is an instrument of study, research, exploration..." (OL 171). This methodological contribution of Marx's makes him, she says, more attractive to the Christian than atheists (OL 177). It is true, however, that there is a change in her later thought. The change corresponds to her development of a Platonic and Christian mysticism. Now, in her later thought, the study of the relations of force demands spiritual training in order to transform it. "Working out a social theory means, instead of worshipping the beast (Plato's metaphor), to study its anatomy, physiology, reflexes, and, above all, to try to understand the mechanism of its conditioned reflexes, that is to say find a method for training it" (OL 165)(my addition). In Simone Weil, this method of training the beast combines a social theory with a mystical *theoria*. In other words, mysticism has the task of imbuing social analysis with a vision that transforms the public sphere in a new light. This new light is provided by contemplation which unites intellectual and manual work at a higher level (MA 254). Such a mystical theory will be brought to bear on the entire social realm, including the political sphere. The effect of this vision will transform the nature of politics from being a 'power-game' to an enterprise that is attentive to the powerless and weak in history and society.

Weil argues in *The Need For Roots* that too often politics is debased to being merely a "technique for acquiring and holding on to power" (NFR 209). A political vision inspired by a Christian and Platonic *theoria*, on the contrary, has detachment from, and annihilation of, the will-to-power as its central end. Through a spiritual training, social change should be seen as nothing less than a hungering and thirsting after justice.

Politics should be inspired by a view of justice formed by supernatural compassion; that is, a compassion which resists the natural inclination for the strong to dominate the weak. Such a compassion inspires the renunciation or annihilation of the will of the strong out of sympathy for the weak. "The sympathy of the strong for the weak, being in the opposite direction, is against nature" (WFG 147-49). Attention to the weak and afflicted demands a creative spirituality that sees what is invisible and embraces what is repulsive. This political vision, she claims, "could be defined as being that of a director of conscience on a national plane" (NFR 206).

At its best, the fruit of such an analysis, via social theory and mystical *theoria*, is the creation of conditions for the possibility of mysticism for all people and groups, not merely among privileged classes. One illuminating metaphor that Weil uses to signify the importance of social and political conditions for the mystical life is the growth of a plant. "One must remember that a plant lives by light and water, not by light alone. So it would be a mistake to count upon grace alone. Energy from this world is also needed" (FLNB 348; also MA 255-56). The task of the farmer is to prepare the soil so that the plant might be able to receive light. "It is not the farmer's job to go in search of solar energy or even to make use of it, but to arrange everything in such a way that the plants capable of using it and transmitting it to us will receive it in the best possible conditions" (SNLG 151). "This shows that good descends from heaven upon earth only to the extent to which certain conditions are in fact fulfilled on earth" (NFR 252).

Therefore, oppressive conditions of force, as in the factory, are obstacles to the mystical life and a transformation of these conditions is a condition for the possibility of

mysticism. It should be obvious that Weil's formulation of mysticism is grounded in historical and social realities. The rule of force in history, the burden of time in the factory, the loss of dignity and the potential for reflection in affliction: all are illuminated by Weil as key moments in her mystical theory. Her major insight in this regard is her refusal to reduce mysticism, as in gnosticism for example, to an a-historical and otherworldly pursuit. One variety of a spurious mysticism "consists in only being prepared to recognize obligations towards what is not of this world...It is only through things and individual beings on this earth that human love can penetrate to what lies beyond" (NFR 150-51).

This concern of Simone Weil does not, however, lead us to conclude that once certain conditions of justice are established mystical decreation immediately follows. Insofar as decreation involves the graced discovery of God at the core of our being, Weil will insist that decreation is not exactly dependent on any material condition any more than God's grace is dependent on human works. Furthermore, even if the reform of social conditions is effective, it does not follow that individuals in this context are protected from the capricious rule of force. Force may still strike a person, group, or nation. There is no way of shielding ourselves from affliction. Suffering in human life is indeed inevitable. What is suggested in this position of Weil is that the establishment of a nurturing soil may allow for the cultivation and advancement of the mystical life and the diminution of, insofar as possible, destruction. A nurturing soil will allow for the cultivation of attention and, concomitantly, the capacity for recognizing and responding to the gift of grace.

Work as Possibility for Mysticism

The tragic vision of Weil asserts, against Marx, that no ultimate escape from human pain, toil, and suffering is possible in human history.⁴² The Good is other-worldly. The ineluctable reality of pain and misery in human life is due to the fact that necessity, not the good, is supreme in our state of exile. Marx's optimism that the curse of work will be lifted and necessity evaded was part of the illusory faith in social evolution of the time, charges Weil (OL 43). That revolution itself would bring about a utopian society was no more than an imaginative and dangerous dream for Weil. Revolution not religion is the opiate of the people. "The hope of a revolution to come satisfies a craving for adventure, of escaping from necessity, which again is a reaction against misery" (MA 247). Even with the transformation of conditions of work to a less servile form, suffering and pain remain. In less servile conditions of work, however, the exercise of the mind and attention is more possible. Transformation of conditions of force into necessity is a key ingredient in making possible human consent. When contemplation and consent is present, necessity and suffering can bring a wisdom and insight into the human condition.

In the thought of Weil, necessity is distinguished from force, though it is not entirely separate. Simone Weil interprets necessity in two ways. First necessity manifests a "mysterious complicity" with the good, as in the case of the beauty of the world (SNLG

⁴²Such a claim is not merely the consequence of a tragic vision, however. The mystic Bernard of Clairvaux, for instance, claims that the intoxicating and passionate mystical union with God is rare and transient. The ecstasy of union soon gives way and the "world presses itself upon him, the day's wickedness troubles him, the mortal body weighs him down....and--more powerfully than these--brotherly love calls him back." See On Loving God, Chapter 10.27, in Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works trans. Gillian Evans (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 195. Given our state of exile, we should glory in the ignominy of the cross rather than in the glory of God (Chapter 4.12, *ibid.*, 183).

12). In order for this face of necessity to be disclosed, however, human thought and attention must be cultivated. Force is thereby persuaded and transformed into necessity by the good. The second face of necessity is indifferent and impersonal with regard to our desires and the good, as in the case of affliction (SNLG 12). In the case of the second face of necessity, force is still present. Necessity here becomes a brutal and destructive master if attention and consent is absent. For the purpose of this chapter I will distinguish between these two readings of necessity by associating the former with necessity proper and the latter with force.

Weil had hoped to create conditions of society which would enable the human spirit to come into contact thoughtfully and attentively with necessity, pain, and suffering in a way that is enriching and not destructive. "The problem is, therefore, quite clear; it is a question of knowing whether it is possible to conceive of an organization of production which, though powerless to remove the necessities imposed by nature and the social constraint arising therefrom, would enable these at any rate to be exercised without grinding down souls and bodies under oppression" (OL 56). In social oppression, force rules in brutal, cold, and destructive manner. In this case force is a blind and indifferent mechanism "that freezes all those it touches right to the depths of their souls" (WFG 124-25). These conditions make conscious reflection and attention a rare reality. The workers live in unconsciousness. In order for force to be transformed into necessity and for work to become a possibility for mysticism, two conditions are important: 1) the change in the actual material conditions, and 2) the cultivation of the mind, spirit, and attention.

Simone Weil offers many practical suggestions concerning the amelioration of the

material work conditions. First and foremost, she had hoped that the workers could begin to participate in their work as free and creative subjects. Weil believed that this must involve extending educational opportunities to the common laborers. She suggested the creation of universities in the service of workers, for example (NFR 52). The task of such schools would be to translate the truths and insights of the culture of intellectuals into a form that would be accessible to the masses. Far from being a degradation of such culture, this act of translation would prove not only enriching of the working classes, but also would enrich our understanding of cultural classics themselves. "It would constitute an extremely precious stimulant for the former (culture), which would in this way emerge from the appalling stuffy atmosphere in which it is confined, and cease being merely something of interest to specialists" (NFR 65, my addition).

At the heart of the cultural training of the peasant workers, Weil suggests, should be an awareness of the beauty and regularity of nature. Peasant literature, such as Hesiod, *Piers Plowman*, the complaints of the Middle Ages, should play an important role in heightening the consciousness of the workers (NFR 85).⁴³ An appreciation and love of the cycle of nature would give the peasants a feeling of participation and belonging to the cosmos. In addition to peasant literature, the parables of Jesus should be an inspiration along these lines, Weil claims. "It is shocking to observe to what extent....religion can be divorced from daily life and reserved for a few hours only on Sunday, when one

⁴³While Weil does not explain what she means by 'complaints of the Middle Ages', she may have in mind the discontent expressed by many of the peasants against the princes and large landowners. These feelings of complaint reached a peak on the eve of the Reformation and led to the 'Peasants Revolt' of 1525. For an interesting anthology of such complaints and grievances see Gerald Strauss, ed. Manifestations of Discontent on the Eve of the Reformation (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971).

remembers what a preference Christ showed for taking the theme of his parables from country scenes" (NFR 83). Workers might find in Greek tragedy, moreover, a vision that illuminates the misfortune, pain, and struggle at the heart of much of the working condition (NFR 67). Clearly, these educational elements play an important role in the spiritual training of the workers for Simone Weil.

While providing educational training clearly plays an important role in ameliorating the conditions of the working classes, nevertheless, this is an insufficient factor if it lacks the change of actual material conditions themselves. Weil believed that a change of material conditions should include the following: factories operating at a much smaller, de-centralized scale; workers having a share in ownership; less dangerous working conditions; doing away with a highly specialized jobs; a less demanding and stressful production speed (FW 194; NFR 70-71). She also believed that obedience among the workers must involve a thoughtful consent and agreement and not a blind, servile self-immolation. She sums up many of her ideas in the following sentence: "We much change the system concerning....the type of stimulants which make for the overcoming of laziness or exhaustion--and which at present are merely fear and extra pay--the type of obedience necessary, the far too small amount of initiative, skill and thought demanded of workmen, their present exclusion from any imaginative share in the work of the enterprise as a whole, their sometimes total ignorance of the value, social utility and destination of the things they manufacture, and the complete divorce between working life and family life" (NFR 52). At the heart of her proposals, which parallel the major ideas of the Roman Catholic papal social encyclicals, is the general insistence that the

human person should take precedence over the interests of production.

If these material conditions and faculties of the human person are transformed and cultivated, necessity and suffering can become an apprenticeship. "The body plays a part in all apprenticeships. On the plane of physical sensibility, suffering alone gives us contact with that necessity which constitutes the order of the world..." (WFG 131-32). In this case, one can love necessity (*amor fati*) in a way that is ennobling. "Let us love the country here below. It is real; it offers resistance to love" (WFG 178). The love of illusions and dreams, by contrast, leads the human person to believe that he or she is unlimited, almighty, even infinite. Power has this intoxicating effect. Such persons "never think of their own strength as a limited quantity...they conclude from this that destiny has given all license to them and none to their inferiors" (ICAG 34-35). The illusion that liberty is such license or the capricious satisfaction of whims is challenged by Weil. On the contrary, true liberty is the "conscious submission to necessity" (OL 107). When labor is accompanied by attention, liberty is most fully realized. Necessity teaches humanity of our fragility, limits, dependency. "Man is a limited being to whom it is not given to be, as in the case of the God of the theologians, the direct author of his own existence..." (OL 87). Necessity is most obvious to us in the pangs of hunger or thirst, when we are poor and needy. Thus physical needs of human life are also a part of Weil's understanding of necessity.

In another sense, moreover, necessity is the general condition of existence for corporeal and thinking beings (NB 452). This not only includes our bodily limits and needs, but also our social, cultural, and psychological conditions and limitations (ICAG

181-82). Being in the world, suggests Weil, means being situated and conditioned. Weil compares 'Dasein' to her notion of 'reading' (NB 199).⁴⁴

Consent to necessity is possible when we are aware of the dependent, limited and fragile character of human nature. A recognition of necessity should make it clear that we are not, in contrast to God, absolute masters of our own fate. This insight, however, is at the same time an act of freedom. Human nature is the only living species capable of being attentive to this fact. "I am always a dual being, on the one hand a passive being who is subject to the world, and on the other an active being who has a grasp on it..." (FW 78). The proper relationship with necessity is one of equilibrium, therefore. Simone Weil suggests that there are three possible ways in which humanity is related to necessity. "In fantasy, or by the exercise of social power, it seems to be his slave. In adversities, privations, grief, but above all in affliction, it seems an absolute and brutal master. In methodical action (work) there is a point of equilibrium..." (ICAG 180; also FLNB 88-90; LP 88) (my addition). In work, the ideal equilibrium is established as a 'thought in action' (praxis) that consents to necessity. The ability to consent to necessity, not to force, is true liberty. "Man is free to consent to necessity or not. This liberty is not actual in him except when he conceives of force as necessity, that is to say, when he contemplates it. He is not free to consent to force as such. The slave who sees the lash lifted above him does not consent, nor refuse his consent, he trembles" (ICAG 182).

⁴⁴The concept of 'reading' in Weil is certainly beyond the scope of this chapter, so let it suffice to say that it seeks to highlight the particular and limited interpretation of reality. All interpretations of reality (readings) are grounded in a limited horizon of being in the world. The concept 'reading' is allied to the decentering of the illusion of being in the center of space.

When a thoughtful and attentive consent is absent, as in the case of oppressive and servile work, force rules in a destructive manner. When the attentive contemplation of force is possible, then force becomes necessity. This requires both the change of material circumstances and educational, spiritual training.

By stating that one does not consent to force, Weil is seeking to avoid the implication that our attitude toward preventable evil should be one of complacent acceptance. "To imitate this indifference (of the impersonal love of God) is simply to consent to it, that is, to accept the existence of all that exists, including the evil, excepting only that portion of evil which we have the possibility, and the obligation, of preventing" (ICAG 184). The *amor fati* that Weil appropriates is the acceptance and affirmation of the here and now of human life even in the face of the dark realities of history and nature (as with Nietzsche). It is not, however, an apathy toward preventable evil!

The recognition of necessity via human labor is nothing else than the awareness of our exile, of the reality of pain, suffering, and cross in human life; as such, it is the beginning of the mystical life. It is the beginning of decreation through participation in the cross (NB 372). The following quote expresses this well: "This world into which we are cast *does* exist; we are truly flesh and blood; we have been thrown out of eternity; and we are indeed obliged to journey painfully through time, minute in and minute out. This travail is our lot, and the monotony of work is but one of the forms that it assumes" (SWR 69).⁴⁵ For Simone Weil, then, the disgust experienced in work makes evident our

⁴⁵The Simone Weil Reader, ed. George Panichas, (New York: Moyer Bell Limited, 1977) 69. In John of the Cross, as well, knowledge of human misery occurs through darkness, pain, suffering--and through labor! "Now that the soul is clothed in these other garments of labor, dryness, and desolation, and that its former lights have been darkened, it possesses more authentic lights in this most excellent and necessary virtue of self-

state of exile. "To admit it to oneself and not yield to it is to rise. This disgust is the burden of Time. It is the cross" (NB 301; also NFR 287). The ascent of the mystical life must be preceded by a descent and labor is a descending movement (NB 269). As a descending movement it is a humble imitation of the kenotic incarnation and crucifixion of God. "Renouncing dreams out of love for the truth means truly abandoning all of one's goods in the folly of love and following Him who is the Truth...and carrying one's own cross. The cross is time."⁴⁶ The goal of human life is eternity, but eternity can only be reached through the endurance of the painful pressure exerted upon us by time. "Time leads out of Time" (NB 278).

The result of the fall in Genesis, in Weil's reading, is the punishment of humanity through labor and death (NFR 286). The cross of Christ makes possible our return to Good, but only if we are willing to consent to suffer death without illusions and consolations.⁴⁷ In human labor the bearing of the cross is no longer an abstract ideal, but now a daily duty. "But consent to suffer death can only be fully real when death is actually at hand...Physical labor is a daily death" (NFR 286). The acceptance of necessity is, thus, the acceptance of our mortality through labor (NB 60-61).

Above I noted that many of the ancient philosophers suggest that philosophy is a training in death. I have insisted that suffering in the thought of Simone Weil can be

knowledge. It considers itself to be nothing and finds no satisfaction in self..." The Dark Night trans. Kieran Kavanaugh (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 190.

⁴⁶See Gabriella Fiori, *op.cit.*, 226.

⁴⁷Heidegger's development of 'being-toward-death' is analogous. See George Steiner, *op.cit.*, 104-06.

more destructive than some of the ancient philosophers assume. The concept of affliction, in relation to oppressive work, is an example of the destructive face of force. With a change in material circumstances and spiritual training to cultivate the mind and spirit, however, suffering becomes a training. As such, suffering in the form of work is a participation in the cross (which is the heart of Weil's notion of decreation). It is not, note, that the experience of suffering is, in itself, constitutive of the mystical life and decreation. It is the heightened awareness and consciousness of suffering and pain in human life that is the beginning of the mystical life--as awareness of our state of exile. The task of such consciousness is at the heart of Weil's notion of attention. Before turning to her mystical vision as a whole in the next chapter, allow me to conclude this chapter with a brief analysis of work as related to her understanding of mystical consciousness and notion of decreation.

The Mysticism of Work

The breakthrough to mystical consciousness or decreation in Weil is associated with the annihilation of the self. The self is a nothingness. "We have to know that we are nothing, that the impression of being somebody is an illusion..." (FLNB 263). Given Simone Weil's analysis of social oppression and the destructive impact of force, is this mystical consciousness of decreation simply another way of phrasing the destruction of the self? In other words, if there is a loss of the self under the impact of force and a loss of the self that is consented to in decreation, is there a fundamental difference between the two conceptions? Of course, there is. When the soul is destroyed under the

oppressive conditions of work, society, or force in general, one is made into a reified thing. The apophatic meaning of decreation, however, insists that the mysterious depths of the human person is no-thing at all. In short, the reification of the self in oppressive work conditions leads to a final death, whereas decreation leads to an annihilation which discovers an-Other agent deep within the soul: God.

"God created me as a non-being which has the appearance of existing, in order that through love I should renounce this apparent existence and be annihilated by the plenitude of being" (FLNB 96). Apophatic language of the self, (in this case 'annihilation' or 'nothingness'), is not a literal description of the self. These terms in Simone Weil should not be seen as a final negation of the human person. Indeed, such apophatic terms are a negation of negation. The ego that is abolished through decreation has no true existence. The fruit of annihilation is a plenitude. With many of the mystical thinkers, the use of the term the 'nothingness' of God (e.g. John Scotus Eriugena) is debased when read as a form of nihilism. So too with regards to the mystery of the self: the nothingness of the self via decreation is a world apart from the reified nothingness via destructive force. Miklos Veto explains decreation in Simone Weil well when he writes: "Decreation, which is at heart self-knowledge, reduces the human being to nothingness, but curiously this reduction implies an 'intensification' of our reality."⁴⁸

The contrasts between these two states abound in Weil's thought. I mentioned some of them at the beginning of this chapter. The idea of 'waiting', for example, takes on

⁴⁸See Miklos Veto, The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil trans. Joan Dargan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) 27.

completely different meaning in different contexts. In the oppressive conditions of the factory, waiting is a humiliating condition of slavery. "Whoever is subdued to the arbitrary is suspended on the thread of time; he is obliged to *wait* (the most humiliating state!...) for what the next moment will bring..." (FLNB 20). On the contrary, waiting in regards to Weil's important mystical notion of attention is the condition for receiving truth, beauty, good, love. "In our acts of obedience to God we are passive; whatever the difficulties we have to surmount, however great our activity may appear to be, there is nothing analogous to muscular effort; there is only waiting, attention, silence, immobility..." (WFG 194). Weil continues that the model of such passivity is the humble (not humiliating) example of Christ at the cross.

The humility that Weil here advocates is a renunciation of one's own ego and will. For her, such a renunciation repudiates the will-to-power through charity. This renunciation of the will and all its motives, intentions, desire for rewards and honor, is the acceptance of the void. In order to allow for grace to descend into the void, no false consolations nor illusions must be entertained. The void thus acts in the form of idolatry-critique. It is a critique or detachment of all our human attachments and worldly goods. Necessity and void, not the Good is supreme here and now. The void is inextricably related to work. When in the form of contemplative action, work renounces all desires of the ego and will. "Work is like a death if it is without an incentive. To act while renouncing at the same time the fruits of action" (NB 79). The seeking of the fruits of action is, for Weil, tantamount to the sin of Adam and Eve (NB 517). They sought the fruit of the tree and were punished. The cross, on the contrary, has no fruit; it is the

model of the renunciation of the seeking of honor, power, possessions, wealth.⁴⁹ Is action possible in this detached form?

Detachment, indifference (in the elevated sense). One says to oneself: I no longer have any incentives; how am I to act? Why am I to act? But therein lies the miracle of the supernatural. Silence all the motives, all the incentives in yourself, and you will nevertheless act, impelled by a source of energy which is other than the motives and the incentives (NB 247).

The result of the decreation or the detached life is clearly not inaction. It is action performed solely for 'the salvation of others'.⁵⁰ It is action which wills and knows nothing. In the words of the medieval mystic Marguerite Porete: "Thus the soul wills nothing, says Love, since she is free; for one is not free who wills something by the will within him, whatever he might will. For when one is a servant of oneself, one wills that God accomplish His will to one's own honor...To such a one, says Love, God refuses His kingdom."⁵¹

In the thought of Simone Weil decreation means that one is no longer a servant of oneself. Love gives without a why, without motives and intentions. One must not even act 'for God'. "Generally speaking, 'for God' is an unsuitable expression. God must not be put in the dative" (NB 358). Virtue must not, again as in Porete, be seen in terms of 'good works' seeking reward. In this sense, Porete speaks of taking leave of the virtues. "It is true that this soul takes leave of virtues, as to their usage and as to the desire for

⁴⁹Miklos Veto interprets the renunciation of the fruits of action in relation to Weil's reading of the Bhagavad Gita. In the Gita Krishna tells Arjuna: "It is the action that is your concern, never its fruits; let the fruit of action never be your motive." Miklos Veto, op.cit., 144.

⁵⁰ibid, 128.

⁵¹Marguerite of Porete. The Mirror of Simple Souls. Chapter 48. trans. Ellen Babinsky (New York: Paulist Press, 1993) 126-27.

that which they demand, but the virtues never take leave of her, for they are always with her."⁵² Virtue is not a means to the earning of rewards or salvation. For Simone Weil, work, too, can be seen in relation to such an apophasis of desire (detachment). By the renunciation of the fruits of action in work, Weil means that work is, in itself, crucial to the fulfillment of human nature. Work should not be debased to a concern for increased rewards or wages. Human labor is the realm in which the human spirit is fully incarnated in the world. In this light, the transformation of the actual conditions of labor is a more important duty than any increase in wages or other rewards (NFR 6-7,51-54,58,70).⁵³

Eckhart is famous for developing some of the above ideas on the detachment of the will while, at the same time, defending a life of intense worldly activity. His well known reading of the Mary and Martha story is exemplary in illuminating the meaning of contemplative action or inactive action in Simone Weil. The traditional privileging of the contemplative role of Mary over the activity of Martha is reversed by Eckhart. In a similar manner, Weil challenges the privileging of the contemplative life over the life of work in the Greek tradition. For Eckhart, Martha is the model of the detached (virgin) soul who lives without a why. Such a virginity does not result in a sterility, but on the contrary, in a fruitful life of activity and the giving of birth to others. Bernard McGinn sums up Eckhart's creative reading of 'Martha': "Martha is the type of soul who in the summit of the mind or depth of ground remains unchangeably united to God, but who

⁵²See Michael Sells, *op.cit.*, 122.

⁵³One of Weil's major criticism of Russian communism was that they delivered the factories and machines of the industrial age from private owners to collective ownership while overlooking the necessity for change in the actual conditions of labor themselves. Social oppression of the workers continued, just now under the yoke of the bureaucratic state (OL 15,40).

continues to occupy herself with good works in the world that help her neighbor and also form her total being closer and closer to the divine image."⁵⁴ Such a vision of praxis is animated by contemplative *theoria*. The ideal Christian life is of, as Ignatius of Loyola put it, 'contemplatives rooted in action'.

Weil is creative and innovative in relating this mystical tradition to human labor. In connecting us to the painful and harsh aspects of reality, work is a participation in the cross in a daily manner. In the form of monotony and disgust, work is a clue into the human state of exile and the burdensome face of time. In a bodily and spiritual manner work realizes the decreation of the 'I'. It thus works in a way akin to detachment in the mystical tradition: it is an apophatic practice and form of idolatry-critique (against idols which conceal our exiled plight and the reality of affliction). If the worker is able to resist filling in the void by consolations, motives, fruits of action, and illusions, work opens the worker to the reception of grace, including an openness to the order, regularity, and beauty of the cosmos (FLNB 38,44,46). Work thereby is the possibility for the mystical life.

The key in the thought of Simone Weil is that some degree of thought and attention, even autonomy, is a pre-requisite for work and suffering to be a possibility for, rather than a limit of, the mystical life. It is only when one has an attentive self that one can consent to the annihilation of the self. Here the example of Christ enduring and protesting, yet also consenting with attentive love to his destiny (necessity) is the model

⁵⁴See Bernard McGinn, "Introduction: Theological Summary" in Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense, op.cit., 60.

for the decreateed spirit. As St. Paul has it, the decreateed spirit has given up her self to make room for God. "I no longer live but now Christ lives within me" (Gal.2:20).

CHAPTER THREE

THE MYSTICAL VISION OF SIMONE WEIL

"What is death for the carnal part of the soul is to see God face to face. That is why we fly from the inner void, because God might steal into it...We know that we cannot see him face to face without dying, and we do not want to die" (NB 623). At the heart of the mystical thought of Simone Weil is the confrontation of human mortality and suffering. A mystical vision of God is hindered by idols which conceal from view the void. False consolations, illusions, imaginary thoughts: such fictions aim at veiling the void, ignoring death and suffering (SNLG 155). As such they are idols. The beginning of a mystical vision, in this light, is the deconstruction of idols. "To believe in God is not a decision we can make. All we can do is to decide not to give our love to false gods" (SNLG 148). "This refusal", Weil continues, "does not presuppose any belief. It is enough to recognize, what is obvious to any mind, that all the goods of this world, past, present, or future, real or imaginary, are finite and limited and radically incapable of satisfying the desire which burns within perpetually within us for an infinite and

perfect good" (SNLG 158). This is one face of the void in Simone Weil.¹ This recognition of the absence of an infinite Good in the world is the other side of an awareness of force and violence, suffering and mortality in history and society. For Weil, the void is the recognition that God is present in the world only under the form of absence, as the *Deus Absconditus* (GG 99).² In the thought of Weil, then, confrontation of the void is a necessary moment in the mystical life; it leads to the death of the ego, "but it inflicts a death which leads to a resurrection" (SNLG 158).

Central to this chapter is an examination of the mystical vision of Simone Weil. I contend that in the mystical vision of Weil the deconstruction of idols is a condition for the reception of God's iconic self-manifestation. In the thought of Weil, attention to (or consciousness of) God is made possible through a confrontation of the void. Weil's interpretation of the void, dark night, detachment, and decreation function in the form of idolatry-critique (or "idoloclasm"). Such a position in Weil begins with an intellectual apophatic critique of conceptual and experiential idols. In addition to this deconstruction of idols, a general consciousness of the hiddenness of God in affliction is central to her notion of the void. Idolatry at this level is any form of thought or experience which averts our attention from affliction. In combining these two aspects of idoloclasm, then,

¹In a similar manner Emmanuel Levinas claims that the infinite Good beyond being cannot be reduced to human material needs, but rather rouses the insatiable desire for Infinity. This desire is excessive and infinite. No finite worldly good ultimately quenches this desire. "The infinite in the finite, the more in the less, which is accomplished by the idea of Infinity, is produced as Desire--not a Desire that the possession of the Desirable slakes, but the Desire for the Infinite which the desirable arouses rather than satisfies. A Desire perfectly disinterested--goodness." See *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969) 50. In Levinas, as with Weil, this is associated with the 'void', or the presence of absence. Levinas calls this the *there is*.

²See chapter five for a development of Weil's understanding of the hiddenness of God.

I am suggesting that idolatry in Weil is that which conceals the transcendence and hiddenness of God. When such idols are deconstructed, the reception of God's self-manifestation through attention is imaginable. Bernard McGinn has claimed that such a vision is a part of much of the mystical tradition: "If the modern consciousness of God is often of an absent God (absent though not forgotten for the religious person), many mystics seem almost to have been prophets of this in their intense realization that the 'real God' becomes a possibility only when the many false gods (even the God of religion) have vanished and the frightening abyss of total nothingness is confronted...This is why many mystics from Dionysius on have insisted that it is the consciousness of God as negation, which is a form of the absence of God, that is the core of the mystic's journey."³ As McGinn himself notes, such a vision of mystical thought finds a congenial ally in Simone Weil.

When the false gods have been destroyed and the void confronted, then a reception of the icon's manifestation becomes a possibility. The iconic gaze is central to Weil's notion of attention. "One of the principal truths of Christianity, a truth that goes almost unrecognized today, is that looking is what saves us. The bronze serpent was lifted up so that those who lay maimed in the depths of degradation should be saved by looking upon it" (WFG 192-93). Weil warns that such looking is debased when the self determines the gaze by domination, control, subjection. "It may be that vice, depravity, and crime are nearly always, or even perhaps always, in their essence, attempts to eat beauty, to eat

³ ³ Bernard McGinn, The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century (New York: Crossroad, 1991) xviii-xix.

what we should only look at" (WFG 166). The reception of the icon is possible only when the self is passive and open to beauty.

Thus, in Simone Weil, the moment of idoloclasm precedes the reception of the icon's manifestation.⁴ One way of interpreting these moments is to relate them to the models of dialectical and analogical thought.⁵ While the critique of idols appropriates the dialectical tradition of theology, the reception of the icon's manifestation displays an appropriation of the analogical tradition (though such *models* are certainly not mutually exclusive of each other). In this light, the two major parts of this chapter are: 1) an analysis of void, dark night, detachment and decreation; 2) a study of the notion of attention in Weil.

Simone understands the relationship between the dialectical and analogical as related to a both a sense of disproportion and proportion, respectively; the relationship

⁴This claim that a moment of idolatry-critique precedes the reception of an icon's manifestation should not be read in simple terms of time. The moment of idolatry-critique, or void, is also the beginning of mystical consciousness in itself and not merely a preparation for the consciousness of God. Jean-Luc Marion suggests as much in mentioning the following quote of Pascal: "That something so obvious as the vanity of the world should be so little recognized that people find it odd and surprising to be told that it is foolish to seek greatness; that is most remarkable." Then Marion remarks: "If vanity strikes the world only in distance, it reaches it only from the sole point of view that, by definition, the world cannot, as world, produce or even suspect. By definition, the arrogant closure of the world on itself closes to it access not only to distance but to the very suspicion of its own vanity." See his God Without Being (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 130-31. Consciousness of God already begins with a recognition of void, even if the culminating point is the reception of the iconic gift of Love, Beauty, Good.

⁵For a full explanation of the meaning of these terms see chapter one of this thesis. Suffice it to say here that analogical theology highlights the sense of harmony or proportion between God-Humanity-World. In this tradition, God is manifested in visible form (e.g. in the beauty of nature, in artistic expression), in the achievement of human history and culture, in human reason, or in ethical behavior. The dialectical tradition, on the other hand, accents the fallen character of human nature, the distance, and non-identity between God and all created being. The Word of God comes to interrupt and negate all human pretensions to divinity, including rational, cultural, historical, or ethical achievements and progress. God's Word is unrecognizable to the wisdom of the world or to the ideals of human and natural beauty. God will only be found where God is most seemingly absent, namely, in the midst of conflict, suffering, sin, cross (for Luther at the 'cloaca').

here being conceived as between humanity, on the one hand, and the world and God, on the other. The formidable task before Weil is to defend a mystical vision which does justice to both interpretations. "The human soul is exiled in time and space, which rob it of its unity; all the methods of purification are simply techniques for freeing it from the effects of time, so that it may come to feel almost at home in its place of exile" (SL 124). An awareness of suffering and void represents the sense of disproportion or the perception of being in exile in the world (SL 125). On the contrary, the sense of proportion "aspires to conceive the world itself as analogous to a work of art, to architecture, or dance, or music" (SL 125). Attention, in relation to aesthetics, functions to help realize this 'aspiration'. The fruit of a mystical consciousness, therefore, is the recognition that "this place of the soul's exile is precisely its fatherland" (SL 125-26).

The objective of this chapter also is to reveal the way in which these two moments of Weil's mystical thought are realized in the form of actual spiritual practices. Void, detachment, dark night, on the one hand, and attention, contemplation, and love, on the other, are forms of spiritual praxis and not simply forms of rational speculation. In the previous chapter on work, we have seen that work (as related to void and detachment) is an apophatic practice. In addition to continuing these reflections on void, the task of this chapter is to develop Weil's understanding of attention, contemplation, and love in relation to spiritual exercises. In short, the dialectical and analogical aspects of Weil's mystical thought are combined in a manner that seeks to validate both the insights of the prophetic tradition and the vision of the mystical tradition, respectively. Concerning mysticism in particular, Weil articulates a vision in which the mystery of God acts to

deconstruct the false gods in order to make room for the graced manifestation of God.

A Philosophical Interpretation of Idol and Icon

A phenomenological reading of 'idol' and 'icon' is developed in an exceptional manner by Jean-Luc Marion. His reading of idol and icon may prove illuminating of the thought of Simone Weil. The pretension to any form of absolute, representational knowledge, either through concept, image, symbol, myth, etc. may be seen as an idol, Marion maintains.⁶ The difference between the icon and the idol is not simply the determination of certain beings (i.e. Christian) against other beings (i.e. pagan).⁷ The idol acts as a mirror in which the divine is reduced to the measure of a human gaze.⁸ The human gaze becomes fixed or frozen on the object and consigns the divine to a human representation. This can occur in any religious form.

Conceptual knowledge, for example, is idolatrous when the divine reality is defined/confined in terms of a human concept. "When a philosophical thought expresses a concept of what it then names 'God', this concept functions exactly as an idol."⁹ Theism, agnosticism, atheism: all equally may merit the accusation of idols if they employ God as a conceptual object of thought. The icon, in contrast to the idol, "does

⁶Jean-Luc Marion, God Without Being (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 23.

⁷Rather than being a reiteration of a polemic against all 'pagan' representations of the divine, Marion insists that idolatry is a real possibility for any religious or secular tradition. "For the Christian iconoclasts of the eighth century gave the name 'idol' to that which had been conceived and venerated as icon of the true God..." (ibid).

⁸ibid, 11-14.

⁹ibid, 16.64.

not result from a vision, but provokes one".¹⁰ The gaze is no longer controlled by and in possession of the human person; instead, the intentional gaze comes from the Other. "The icon opens in a face, where man's sight envisages nothing, but goes back infinitely from the visible to the invisible by the grace of the visible itself..."¹¹ The icon is excessive, infinite, invisible. As such, the human gaze never fills the depths of the icon (as the aim fills and settles on the idol). The human gaze is provoked and transformed by the excess, mystery and infinity of the icon. For Marion, and the Christian tradition in general, the primary icon is God's excessive self-disclosure as Love.

Since the manifestation of God as *Agape* is not dependent upon human intentionality, will or effort it comes as pure gift. In order for this to be possible, however, the deconstruction of idols must prepare the way for the excessive gift of the icon. What is it that prepares for such an iconic manifestation? Marion suggests the following: "in a word, we are looking for an attitude where the gaze no longer would see any idol, though still not pretending to the impossible *agape*...a gaze that sees nothing, but that loves nothing, with neither idol nor *agape*."¹² For Marion, this attitude that acts in an idoloclastic manner is an awareness of vanity, including the sense of boredom or melancholy. "As love, however, remains essentially inaccessible to us, the suspension that delivers God from Being becomes feasible for us only in its negative aspect--the

¹⁰ibid, 17.

¹¹ibid, 19.

¹²ibid, 111.

vanity that melancholy pours over the world of beings."¹³ The result of an encounter with vanity is a deprivation of any confidence, comfort, or trust in the world; it is detachment and a sense of exile, for Simone Weil. In boredom, for example, the idols are annulled by a pervasive indifference and apathy. "The gaze of boredom neither denies nor affirms; it abandons, so far as to abandon itself, with neither love nor hate, through pure indifference."¹⁴

Interestingly, the text that becomes crucial for Marion is the book of Ecclesiastes (a text that has many affinities with the thought of Weil). The tearing away of the gaze from the idol, Marion contends, is 'vanity'. Vanity is seen by Qoheleth to affect all of creation. All the goods of the world are stricken with vanity. In contrast to the book of Job, "Qoheleth declares....the vanity, not at all of what he would have lost or desired in vain, but of what he possesses; for he has it all, in well-accounted and known goods, as much for the spirit ('I have a considerable sum of wisdom'; Eccles. 1:16), as for matter ('I satisfied all the desires of my eyes, I refused my heart no pleasure'; Eccles. 2:10)..."¹⁵ The vanity of all under the sun suggests that the goods of creation are a fragile mist, transient and impermanent. The life of humanity is also fragile, destined to dissipate and perish. Just as the blade of grass flies away so too does creaturely, mortal existence.

Vanity arises, therefore, from a gaze which detaches itself from the world and which does not yet receive the gift of Love. Simone Weil's understanding of the void is similar

¹³ibid. 3,113.

¹⁴ibid. 116.

¹⁵ibid. 124.

to this reading of vanity (though there is a major difference in including the book of Job as a source for her understanding of the void, as we will see). The void detaches us from the idolatry of the world (for Weil, Plato's cave). A recognition of the nothingness and vanity of creation is a condition for the possibility of mysticism. Weil calls this stage one of "nonbelief" (WFG 211). Beyond this stage, an attentive waiting is necessary to receive God's excessive self-disclosure as Love, Beauty, Good.

The Metaphors 'Darkness' and 'Void' in the Christian Tradition¹⁶

¹⁶I would like to briefly examine some of the sources for Weil's interpretation of void. Even if they are not explicitly referred to by Weil, they do inform her position. We have seen in the last chapter that the role that physics played among the ancient Greek philosophers was, in the words of Pierre Hadot, "definitive detachment from the sensible world and contemplation of the order of nature...." (Philosophy as a Way of Life trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995) 137). In the case of Origen, among other Christian thinkers, the book of Ecclesiastes is seen as a textbook of physics. What physics was for the Stoics, therefore, manifests many affinities with the book of Ecclesiastes and is appropriated by the early Christian thinkers as preparation for the mystical life. Consider some of the following quotes from Marcus Aurelius (a figure Weil certainly read). "Think often of the speed with which all that is and comes to be passes away and vanishes; for Being is like a river in perpetual flux, its activities are in constant transformation, and its causes in myriad varieties....Think of the whole of being, in which you participate to only a tiny degree; think of the whole of eternity, of which a brief, tiny portion has been assigned to you; think about fate, of which you are such an insignificant part...Asia and Europe are little corners of the world; every sea is a droplet of the world; each present instant of time is a point in eternity; everything is puny, unstable, and vanishing" (ibid 183). The sense of transience, fragility, mortality, and vanity permeates much of the work of Aurelius as well as other Stoics. The understanding of void in Simone Weil is informed by such a vision. For both the Stoics and the early Christian thinkers, (and certainly for Weil), meditation on such thoughts have a purgative purpose. The recognition of the void in Weil effects a decentering of our illusory belief that we are in the center of time and space. The void in Weil, in this sense, is the claim that there is no one center in the world (WFG 158). It is this kind of perspective, linked with Plato's insistence that we live in illusion and unconsciousness, which Weil interprets as human exile. In addition to this tradition, Weil appropriates (in a syncretic manner often unrecognized by Weil herself) the Jewish and Christian vision of the 'nothingness' of creation. The reception of the Greek traditions by the early Jewish and Christian thinkers certainly effected a transformation of the Greek vision. Creatio Ex Nihilo is, thus, central to the Jewish and Christian traditions. The difference between the Jewish thinker Philo of Alexandria and Plato, for example, is the former's insistence on the absolute nothingness of created being. "Divinization for Philo", explains Bernard McGinn, "thus implies a self-naughting absent in much of the pagan mystical tradition" (The Foundations of Mysticism (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 39). As we will see, this aspect of 'self-naughting' is clearly an important aspect of Weil's thought. This vision of the nothingness of creation is dominant throughout the entire Christian tradition as well. Consider John of the Cross, for instance: "All creatures of heaven and earth are nothing when compared to God...By saying that he saw an empty earth (Jeremiah), he meant that all its creatures were nothing and that the earth too was nothing" (The Ascent of Mount Carmel, Chapter 4, in John of the Cross: Selected Writings trans. K. Kavanaugh (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 66)(my addition). Needless to say, the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* shapes the entire Christian

The metaphors of void or darkness in the Christian tradition have been susceptible to many different interpretations. First, the metaphor of the darkness of God has been associated with an apophatic critique of all human desires, attachments, ideas, images, concepts, etc.. In other words, God is the Divine Darkness (Gregory of Nyssa) who limits and relativizes our attempts to sensibly or conceptually imagine God.¹⁷ Andrew Louth shows how this apophatic tradition stems from the Patristic thinkers, in particular.¹⁸ This apophatic use of the metaphor 'darkness' stems from an interpretation of Moses' encounter with God at Mt. Sinai in *Exodus* as well as from Plato's allegory of the cave. This tradition, Louth argues, employs the metaphor of 'darkness' in an intellectual and theoretical manner. Almost completely absent from their interpretation of the metaphor 'darkness' is any auto-biographical account of personal experiences. Thus, idols in this tradition could include false worldly desires and attachments, on the one hand, and concepts and images which pretend to absolute knowledge of God, on the other. Even if in an implicit manner, the vision of the book of Ecclesiastes is a congenial partner for

tradition and effects a transformation (not annulment) of the Greek tradition. I am claiming that Simone Weil appropriates in a quite unsystematic manner both the Greek sense of creation as vain, transient, fragile and the Christian confession in the nothingness of creation.

¹⁷In this regard, Denys Turner mentions the following words of Gregory of Nyssa: "For leaving behind everything that is observed, not only what sense comprehends but also what the intelligence thinks it sees, it keeps on penetrating deeper until by the intelligence's yearning for understanding it gains access to the invisible and the incomprehensible, and there it sees God...When, therefore, Moses grew in knowledge, he declared that he had seen God in the darkness, that is, when he had then come to know that what is divine is beyond all knowledge and comprehension..." (*The Darkness of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 17). In reference to the intellectual character of Pseudo-Dionysius, moreover, Turner writes: "It is therefore the *eros* of knowing, the passion and yearning for the vision of the One, which projects the mind up the scale; it is the dialectics of 'knowing and unknowing' which govern that progress, and it is not in the traditional metaphors of affectivity, touch, taste and smell, but in the visual metaphors of light and dark, seeing and unseeing, that progress is described" (ibid 47).

¹⁸Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) 182,186.

this apophatic tradition in the way it emphasizes the transience, finitude and insufficiency of all worldly goods and symbols.

In the second model, Louth argues, the metaphor of the darkness of God takes on (at least in the later middle ages in the west) a more affective, experiential connotation.¹⁹ The author of the Cloud of Unknowing, for example, claims that only through love can the dark cloud of unknowing be pierced. The best example of this experiential and afflictive interpretation of darkness and void is John of the Cross. In reference to the first apophatic, intellectual tradition, John mentions Pseudo-Dionysius. "This is why St. Dionysius and other mystical theologians call this infused contemplation a ray of darkness...For this great supernatural light overwhelms the intellect and deprives it of its natural vigor."²⁰ But John goes on to mention another way of interpreting 'darkness'. "Why, if it is a divine light...does one call it a dark night? In answer to this, there are two reasons why this divine wisdom is not only night and darkness for the soul, but also affliction and torment."²¹ John explains that such a sense of affliction and torment is the experience of God's absence, or even worse, "it seems God is against them and they are against God."²² The book of Job plays an important role in this sense of darkness or void, as we will see.

¹⁹ibid. As Bernard McGinn has suggested to me, this experience can be one of overwhelming love (as in Bonaventure) or one of interior pain and suffering.

²⁰John of the Cross, The Dark Night, Book 2, Chapter 5, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 201.

²¹ibid.

²²ibid, 202.

Finally, a third interpretation of the metaphors of darkness or void is represented by contemporary liberation thinkers. Here the darkness of suffering or affliction is seen in relation to whole groups and histories of oppression. The destructive impact of force produces a void in the lives of its victims. As I hope to show in what follows, Weil incorporates all three of these traditions in her interpretation of the metaphors void, darkness, nakedness, detachment, and decreation.

*Void, Dark Night and Detachment in Simone Weil*²³

The third reading of void and darkness in relation to force and oppression in history and society has already been explored in chapter two in reference to oppressive conditions of work. A more developed analysis is the major objective of chapter five, so in this chapter I will focus on the first two mystical models.

Concerning the first of the above models, we can distinguish between two aspects of this category: first, the active voiding of our sensual and worldly attachments; second, the voiding of our experiential and conceptual/imaginative idols. As mentioned, this dual understanding of the process of voiding or detachment is allied to the vision of *Ecclesiastes* and can be traced back to Plato and the Stoics. The apophatic element, however, is fully developed only with the early Christian thinkers. The second model of the interpretation of void and darkness in the Christian tradition is central to the dark night of John of the Cross and the theology of Luther. The actual experience of affliction

²³I should note that Weil reads the ideas and practices of void, dark night, detachment, and decreation in very similar manners. They all function as deconstructing the idols of worldly attachments including desires, material possessions, concepts and images of God, as well as the egoistic self. Finally a confrontation with actual affliction plays an important role in all of these ideas.

and suffering comes to determine the reading of void and darkness. A confrontation with the hiddenness of God, as in Job, is central to the meaning of void or darkness. The *via negativa* becomes a theology of the cross. Simone Weil directs this meaning of the void and dark night to include the destruction of memory and suffering of whole groups of oppressed peoples, however. The domination of force in history and society is confronted in a way not fully developed in John of the Cross or Luther.

Simone Weil interprets the ideas and practices of void or dark night as instigating three possible effects or responses. The void or dark night may lead either to destruction, decreation, or the filling in of the void by consolations, illusions, fantasies, certain ideas and concepts, in short, idols. In Weil's words: "Idolatry is a vital necessity in the cave...The imagination is continually working to stop us all the fissures through which grace might pass" (NB 150). In order to make decreation possible, a voiding, emptying and detachment from all attachments, including experiential and conceptual/imaginative idols is a pre-requisite. The dawn of decreation emerges with the twilight of the idols.

There is, however, a danger in confronting the void. The possibility of destruction is all-too-real. "Whoever for an instant bears up against the void, either he receives the supernatural bread, or else he falls. Terrible risk; but we have got to run it, and even for an instant without hope. But we must not plunge into it (Second temptation)" (NB 156). This danger most clearly pertains to affliction and suffering. If one is capable of facing affliction without filling in the void with idols, one passes over to decreation.

The Voiding of Sensual and Material Idols

In John of the Cross, the voiding of sensual idols is named the 'active night of the senses'. "When the appetites are extinguished--or mortified--one no longer feeds on the pleasure of these things, but lives in a void and in darkness with respect to the appetites...We are dealing with the denudation of the soul's appetites and gratifications. This is what leaves it free and empty of all things, even though it possesses them."²⁴ John insists that the soul must become naked, empty, and purified. The process of doing so is the casting out of "strange Gods, all alien affections and attachments."²⁵ Interestingly, for both John of the Cross and Weil, it is not necessarily the things of the world in themselves that cause damage, but "the will and appetite dwelling within..."²⁶

Simone Weil finds the metaphors of nakedness, death, void, and detachment to be of the "purest mysticism" (ICAG 81). She cites the examples of Plato, St. Paul and John of the Cross. The willingness to confront death and cross is a condition for the possibility of truth. "The truth is not revealed except in nakedness and that nakedness is death, which means the rupture of all those attachments which for each human being constitute the reason for living; those whom he loves, public esteem and possessions, material and moral, all that" (ICAG 82). For Weil, the person who succeeds in casting off her attachments and facing the void is the just person. In her creative reading of justice in Plato's Republic, she insists that the person who is truly just (not just in appearance)

²⁴John of the Cross, The Ascent of Mount Carmel, Book 1, Chapter 3, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, op.cit., 64.

²⁵Book 1, Chapter 5, *ibid.*, 71.

²⁶Book 1, Chapter 3, *ibid.*, 65.

willingly suffers persecution, death and even public ignominy for the sake of justice. "Plato does not say but he implies that in order to become just, which requires self-knowledge, one must become, already in this life, naked and dead" (SNLG 96). I will return to this point later.

At this level of sensual and worldly detachment, the mystical life begins with carnal privations or asceticism. This is an acceptance of the void at a material level (NB 137). Philosophizing, or praying Weil adds, is learning how to die to our worldly attachments, namely, our material possessions, public esteem, passions of avarice, anger, hatred, revenge, envy, jealousy, etc.. (NB 136; also FLNB 235). The training of the body, Weil says, seeks to transform the egoistic 'animals' within us. "These animals are the thing within me which incessantly, in diverse accents of sorrow, exultation, triumph, anxiety, fear, pain, and every other emotional nuance, keeps on crying 'me, me, me, me, me'" (FLNB 231).²⁷

Finally, however, these forms of detachment from our sensual and worldly attachments (as ascetical exercises) are insufficient to lead to a mystical consciousness of God.²⁸ At best, they are forms of preparation for such consciousness. This is especially

²⁷ Along with the Stoics, moreover, Weil sought to cultivate detachment from the conventions of society through spiritual exercises. "A smile from Louis 14, considered as an object of desire, is the shadow of a manufactured object. The manufactured object is the institution of royalty--an arbitrary institution, a convention...Must continually make this analysis with regard to every object of desire..." (NB 563). A consideration of the arbitrary and conventional character of social and cultural practices was to lead to the emptying of our attachments (e.g. Marx on fetishism).

²⁸ It is true that Weil suggests that there is greater effort involved in the stage of 'preparation for' than of the other two stages. Disgust for manual labor may call for a strong, determined will to confront the harsh demands of work, for example. "Will power, the kind that, if need be, makes us set our teeth and endure suffering, is the principal weapon of the apprentice engaged in manual work" (WFG 110). Even attention, at a lower level, requires some active effort, even if it is a negative effort. Eventually, however, the will and striving self (i.e. asceticism) must be renounced, even annihilated (ibid 111). This is not only true of attention.

true in that the active will and intelligence is involved at this level. In the terminology of John of the Cross, the active night of the senses must give way to the passive nights. The active, ascetical self easily degenerates into, in John's words, spiritual "avarice" or "gluttony". "What I condemn in this is possessiveness of heart..."²⁹ Thus, in the case of Weil, the will eventually must be exhausted in order to pass over to a consciousness of God (FLNB 326). "They are not useful (ascetical exercises) if they proceed from a resolution" (FLNB 127)(my addition). Of course, it is important to insist that the insufficiency of active detachment is not only true at this level of sensual asceticism, but also at the level of experiential and conceptual/imaginative detachment. Indeed, the rule of the active, controlling will is the chief obstacle to attention, for Weil.

The Voiding of Experiential and Conceptual/Imaginative Idols

Simone Weil is quite innovative in her broad vision of the potential idols humanity worships. The idols in need of deconstruction include false consolations, illusions, fantasies; visions and locutions (as putative 'mysticism'); the human ego and its will, motives, desires; nationalism, classicism, eurocentrism, racism; and finally the concept God. Spiritual nakedness, detachment, or the process of voiding is an emptying of all such idols.

At this level of detachment from experiential and conceptual idols, Eckhart is an

but also, as we have seen, of work. When the disgust, pain, and suffering of work are confronted we have the chance of passing over through time to a glimpse of eternity. Here work is no longer a determined act of the will, but rather a spiritual exercise without an active, controlling will.

²⁹The Dark Night, Book 1, Chapter 3. op.cit.. 168.

exceptional example who may shed light on the mystical elements of Weil. For Eckhart, the mystical way of life is a state of 'virginity', free from all experiences, images, concepts, etc.. The mystical life is a renunciation of the will and all desires, motives, intentions, including the will to please God. "So long as you perform your works for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, or for God's sake, or for the sake of your eternal blessedness, and you work them from without, you are going completely astray."³⁰ True poverty or nakedness is longing and wanting nothing. This brings about a freedom that is detached from all knowing and experiencing of God. "He should be so free of all knowing that he does not know or experience or grasp that God lives in him."³¹ As mentioned in chapter two, Eckhart insists that one should not pretend to find God more in inwardness and sweetness than at the stable or fireside. The comprehension of God as pure naked simplicity follows upon such nakedness or detachment. God is the nameless One.³²

John of the Cross is similar to Eckhart in this moment of detachment. Faith is a darkness or nudity which relativizes and annuls all experiential, imaginative, and conceptual idols. "Insofar as they are capable, people must void themselves of all, so that however many supernatural communications they receive they will continually live as though denuded of them and in darkness. Like the blind, they must lean on dark faith,

³⁰German Sermons, Sermon 5b, Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense trans. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1981) 183.

³¹German Sermons, Sermon 52, op.cit., 201.

³²Eckhart insists that God is beyond names. "I say that whoever perceives something in God and attaches thereby some name to him, that is not God. God is above names and above nature." (ibid, German Sermons, Sermon 53, 204). In spite of this, Eckhart speaks of God in terms of the Simple One or Naked Unity.

accept it for their guide and light, and rest on nothing of what they understand, taste, feel, or imagine."³³ This understanding of faith functions as idoloclasm. It deconstructs all idols of the intelligence, will and experience. Along these lines, the seeking of consolations is, for John, an indication of a "spiritual sweet tooth" which reveals one to be an enemy of the cross of Christ.³⁴ John is particularly critical of any association of 'supernatural visions' or 'locutions' with faith. "But when there is a question of imaginative visions or other supernatural communications apprehensible by the senses and independent of one's free will, I affirm that at whatever time or season they occur...individuals must not desire to admit them, even though they come from God."³⁵ In a manner reminiscent of Luther, John asserts that Christ was the final and ultimate vision or locution.³⁶

John also relates this understanding of faith to a loving attentiveness. This loving attentiveness is devoid of the intellect and will. It may need to use concepts, images, and forms, but "the soul will have to empty itself of the images and leave this sense in darkness if it is to reach divine union."³⁷ John also compares this 'loving attentiveness' to contemplation in which discursive meditation is discontinued.³⁸

³³The Ascent of Mount Carmel, Book 2, Chapter 4, op.cit., 85.

³⁴ibid, Book 2, Chapter 7, 95.

³⁵ibid, Book 2, Chapter 17, 125.

³⁶ibid, Book 2, Chapter 22, 128-29.

³⁷ibid, Book 2, Chapter 12, 106.

³⁸ibid, 108 and Book 2, Chapter 13, 110.

Thus, in the case of John and Eckhart, a spiritual nakedness or void and a state of virginity function to detach us from all idols of an experiential and conceptual/imaginative nature.³⁹ In Simone Weil, the critique of idols includes these elements of idoloclasm, but is more explicitly extended in new directions.

Concerning the critique of conceptual/imaginative idols, Weil asserts that the intelligence must become silent in order to discover truths that it would otherwise overlook. "When the intelligence, having become silent in order to let love invade the whole soul, begins once more to exercise itself, it finds it contains more light than before, a greater aptitude for grasping objects, truths that are proper to it. Better still, I believe that these silences constitute an education for it which cannot possibly have any other equivalent and enable it to grasp truths which otherwise would for ever remain hidden from it...Is not this what St. John of the Cross means when he calls faith a night?" (LTP 58-59). In many instances, Weil claims that divine mysteries are darkness to the intellect, but a darkness that is more luminous than what is luminous to the intelligence (NB 226). The significance of contradiction (as with the Zen koan) is to bring the intellect to its knees, to make evident the limits of intellectual knowledge. "The search for the meaning of the *koan* results in a 'dark night' which is followed by illumination" (NB 396). The conceptual idols of intelligence which pretend to absolute knowledge must be silenced.

In relation to the will, moreover, the dark night or void manifests the impotency of active effort. The will must be annihilated. In a manner not unlike Marguerite Porete's

³⁹Differences between John and Eckhart are important. For Eckhart recollection or awareness of our pre-existent self in God is the central end of the mystical life. In John, the establishment of hope for a new future is crucial. The loss of memory in John occurs through crisis, conflict, suffering. See Denys Turner, *op.cit.* 177-78.

Mirror of Simple Souls, Weil states: "*exhaust* the human faculties (will, intelligence, etc.) so as to pass over to the transcendent" (FLNB 361). The way in which Weil advocates the annihilation of the will insists on the exhaustion of the faculties through actual exercise. "The will and the discursive intelligence which makes plans are adult faculties. We must use them up. We must destroy them by wearing them out" (FLNB 326). By wearing them out they become humbled by their frailty. "There is no entry into the transcendent until the human faculties--intelligence, will, human love--have come up against a limit, and the human being waits at this threshold, which he can make no move to cross, without turning away and without knowing what he wants, in fixed, unwavering attention...Genius is the supernatural virtue of humility..." (FLNB 335). Genius readily accedes to the finite and limited character of the human intelligence and will.

In exhausting the will, the renunciation of all motives and fruits of action should follow. Love proceeds not for the sake of a 'good work' or even 'for God', but without a why. "Love without any prospect in view" (NB 276). "The sufferer and the other love each other, starting from God, through God, but not for the love of God; they love each other for the love of the one for the other" (WFG 151). "One must labour and sow, not in order to reap, but from pure obedience. Act, while renouncing the fruits of action" (FLNB 267). In this regard, she insists that true renunciation is not from action itself, but from seeking fruits of action (NB 145). Along these lines the classic vision of Eckhart is illustrative. Eckhart maintains that those who seek God for a purpose, a 'why', are misguided. "Whoever is seeking God by ways is finding ways and losing God, who in ways is hidden. But whoever seeks for God without ways will find him as he is in

himself, and that man will live with the Son, and he is life itself. If anyone went on for a thousand years asking of life: 'Why are you living?' life, if it could answer, would only say: 'I live so that I may live.'⁴⁰ Simone Weil consistently expresses herself in a similar manner. Life is to be lived, love is to be performed, not for self-motivated purposes and intentions, but rather in a spontaneous and free manner. Of course, this vision of action without motives is not only a part of the mystical tradition, it is also present in Kant's moral philosophy. Action for the sake of obedience to duty should be the motivating factor irrespective of any consequences, good or bad.

In terms that we have seen thus far, idols can be considered as objects of the intellect or motives of the will. Equally pernicious, Weil claims, are consoling and imaginative experiences. As with John of the Cross, those seeking such experiences are seen as enemies of the cross of Christ. She declares that Christ had no such experiences on the cross. "He had no visions or voices on the Mount of Olives, nor on the cross" (NB 272). The danger of such consoling experiences lies in their obstruction of grace. The voiding of these products of the imagination, as in John of the Cross, makes possible the reception of grace. "Men exercise their imaginations in order to stop up the holes through which grace might pass, and for this purpose, and at the cost of a lie, they make for themselves idols..." (NB 145). One of these idols can be our understanding of God. "Religion in so far as it is a source of consolation is a hindrance to true faith: in this sense atheism is a purification" (GG 104).

⁴⁰German Sermons, Sermon 5b. op.cit., 183-84.

Even God can become an idol, asserts Weil.⁴¹ Facing the void, human nakedness, and death is the condition for passing over to the true God. "But when God has become as full of significance for one as the miser's treasure has for him, one should keep on firmly repeating to oneself that He doesn't exist, experience the fact of loving him even though He doesn't exist" (NB 421). When God becomes to us as a treasure to a miser, we need atheism to purify our notion of God. This purification cleanses us from a god created to fulfill our desires, wants, demands. "We must know that nothing that we touch, hear or see, etc., nothing that we visualize to ourselves, nothing that we think of is the good. If we think of God, that is not the good either" (NB 491). "I am quite sure that there is not a God in the sense that I am quite sure nothing real can be anything like what I am able to conceive when I pronounce this word" (GG 103). In this case, Weil certainly would have affirmed the sanctity of Eckhart's prayer for God to free us from God.⁴²

This stage of the mystical life is one of nonbelief, says Weil. It is a negation of all attempts to understand God by particular experiences or ideas. "In trying to do so it either labels something else with the name of God, and that is idolatry, or else its belief in God remains abstract and verbal...At a time like the present, incredulity may be equivalent to the dark night of Saint John of the Cross..." (WFG 211). The destruction of idols is a crucial stage of the preparation for the consciousness of God. In this sense,

⁴¹This voiding of our conceptions of God may also include a detachment from the 'moral God' (as with Jean-Luc Marion's work). Weil claims that there is a certain kind of morality which is more pernicious to good than amorality (SNLG 169). In her writings on Marx, for example, she maintains that morality is often defined by the ruling groups of society. "Furthermore, all the conceptions that are current in any society whatsoever are influenced by the specific morality of the group which dominates that society" (OL 156). When God acts to legitimize such a notion of morality, our idea of God is in need of purification.

⁴²German Sermons, Sermon 52, op.cit., 200.

it is a stage which detaches one from allegiance to the idol, but is prior to the reception of the icon's manifestation.

This deconstruction of idols in Weil is also extended in new directions not explicitly developed in the mystical tradition. The meaning of the void is related to the claim that there is no center within the world. "Just as God, being outside the universe, is at the same time the center, so each man imagines he is situated in the center of the world. The illusion of perspective places him at the center of space...and yet another kindred illusion arranges a whole hierarchy of values around him" (WFG 158). The illusion that Europe is the center of all values is a major target of criticism in Weil. It is no more than a small corner of the globe. Not unlike the liberation theologians, Weil asserts that a recovery of traditions beyond Europe is central to a true catholic vocation. In order for Christianity to be catholic an embrace of excluded traditions, including "all the countries inhabited by colored races...all the traditions banned as heretical" must permeate Christianity (WFG 75).

The illusion of being the center of space equally applies to the pretensions of modern nations. The idolatry of nations has led to the upsurge of totalitarianism in the modern world. "Nowhere does it appear that any city, or people, should have thought itself chosen for a supernatural destiny" (NFR 125). In this case, Weil argues that God is debased into a figure serving a national interest. The idea of the void (as the absence of God) interrupts the confidence that God rules a particular nation through providence. "Christianity became a totalitarian, conquering and destroying agent because it failed to develop the notion of the absence and non-action of God here below" (NB 505). Weil's

understanding of the impersonal God is, here, linked to the critique of a personal, providential idol-god (NFR 259).

In the exceptional essay, "The Power of Words", Weil extends the interpretation of modern idols to include the nation, security, capitalism, communism, fascism, order, authority, property, democracy. "Each of these words seems to represent for us an absolute reality, unaffected by conditions, or an absolute objective, independent of methods of action, or an absolute evil..." (MA 1986 222). While we live, she explains, in finite, contingent and varying realities we "act and strive and sacrifice ourselves and others by reference to fixed and isolated abstractions..." (MA 223). For the sake of empty words with capital letters we are willing to shed blood. The critique of these idols is a central task in the mystical thought of Weil. All concepts, ideas, symbols, myths, narratives, etc. which pretend to absolute knowledge are in need of demolition.

This deconstructive task is to serve more than the cultivation of a private religious life; it is to further the well-being of the public realm. "To sweep away these entities from every department of political and social life is an urgently necessary measure of public hygiene" (MA 237). The use of qualifying terms, Weil argues, is to perform the function of relativizing entities. "By reviving the intelligent use of expressions like *to the extent that, in so far as, on condition that, in relation*, and by discrediting all those vicious arguments which amount to proclaiming the dormitive virtue of opium, we might be rendering a highly important practical service to our contemporaries" (MA 237-38). Such qualifying terms highlight the finitude and limits of human knowledge.

Mystical language of the void, dark night, and detachment in Simone Weil is a crucial

exercise in deconstructing such idols. Mysticism, in this light, is not to be confined within the realm of 'inwardness or devotion' to borrow the words of Eckhart. One can bring mysticism to bear on the public realm.

In conclusion, we can see that the first two stages or categories seen thus far correspond to apophatic detachment from idols of desire or theory. In this light, the ideas of void or darkness are quite traditional and stretch back into the Patristic origins of Christianity. Simone Weil appropriates this tradition through her reading of the Greeks, Stoics, and the Christian mystical thinkers. In an innovative manner, then, Weil interprets and extends this tradition in relation to a wide variety of modern problems and issues. Detachment in this tradition is allied to the vision of the book of *Ecclesiastes*. Whether or not the text is explicitly invoked is not central to my position: what is crucial, however, is the claim that in the book of *Ecclesiastes* all worldly goods are disclosed to be unsatisfactory, transient, fragile, and finite. The early Christian mystical traditions employ this sense of *Ecclesiastes* in order to foster a detachment from worldly goods, including from all concepts, images, and experiences which pretend to absolute knowledge of God. The problem is not the same as in the case of Job. The problem of Job, on the contrary, is caused by the loss of his external goods and a general sense of affliction and abandonment by God. This redefines the understanding of the void, detachment and decreation by raising the issue of the hiddenness of God.

Void and the Hiddenness of God

In an illuminating essay on Luther and mysticism, Heiko A. Oberman makes an

important point regarding the understanding of 'darkness' in Luther. Oberman asserts that in Luther 'darkness' means more than the apophatic negation of all intellectual attempts to comprehend God, as in the case of Pseudo-Dionysius. "In 1514 it is already clear that 'darkness,' --*tenebrae, umbra, or caligo*--shares in the double meaning of *abscondere* and *absconditas*..."⁴³ It is not simply that God *transcends* our speculations, but that, as the rest of Oberman's essay implies, God is *hidden* from us as long as we have the status of a *viator*. The status of the *viator* is an inescapable fact of our finite and exiled human existence. Suffering and cross comprise a part of reality here and now. A mysticism which seeks sweet experiences and ignores suffering is, as John of the Cross says, an enemy of the cross of Christ.

The crucial point, Oberman suggests, is that "true negative theology is 'theology of the cross'."⁴⁴ The 'valley of tears' of our exiled existence is identified with the cross of Christ in Luther. A mystical embrace of Christ will not, thus, be sweet and splendid, but "death and hell." In Luther's words: "God wants us to be trained (by the cross), not absorbed."⁴⁵ The mystical ecstasy of Luther is, as Oberman explains, an *excessus* which does not "imply the transcendence of this valley of tears and a rest in the peace of God, but the 'demasquer' of the enemies of truth (i.e. the flesh and the world) and marks the beginning rather than the end of battle."⁴⁶ The *viator* is the exiled soldier who brings the

⁴³Heiko A. Oberman, The Dawn of the Reformation (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1986) 132.

⁴⁴ibid, 143.

⁴⁵ibid.

⁴⁶ibid, 147. Oberman explains that 'excessus' in Luther also implies the humbling knowledge of human misery.

sword (not peace) against the complacency and apathy of the world. The sign that Christ is with the mystical theologian will not be found in consoling experiences, visions or locutions. "Therefore if you look for a sign of the grace of God or wonder whether Christ himself is in you", Luther says, "no other sign is given to you but the sign of Jonah. Therefore if you were to be in hell for three days, *that* is the sign that Christ is with you and you in Christ."⁴⁷ True mystical insight into the wisdom and love of God is revealed in hiddenness; at the location of the suffering and dying Christ and by human participation in the cross. There is no other way of becoming a mystical theologian. In another statement to which Simone Weil and John of the Cross would accede, Luther asserts: "By living, indeed by dying and being damned, one becomes a theologian, not by thinking and reading and speculating."⁴⁸

John of the Cross and Simone Weil share aspects of this same understanding of the *Deus Absconditas*. Weil's interpretation of darkness, void, and detachment has affinities with such a theology of the cross. In this perspective, affliction plays a central role in their mystical vision.⁴⁹ In the thought of John of the Cross, those who seek God by sweet and consoling experiences are enemies of the cross of Christ. "Such an

⁴⁷ibid, 149.

⁴⁸ibid, 150.

⁴⁹The hiddenness of God in John and Weil is shaped by a similar perspective, as in their interpretation of the absence of a beloved. In John's Spiritual Cantic the soul yearns for her absent beloved in the following manner: "Where have you hidden, Beloved, and left me moaning? You fled like a stag after wounding me; I went out calling you and you were gone. Shepherds, you that go up through the sheepfolds to the hill, if by chance you see Him I love most, tell him that I sicken, suffer, and die" (The Spiritual Cantic, Stanza 1-2, op.cit., 221). While in less of a nuptial sense, Weil interprets the play Electra by Sophocles in a similar way. Electra yearns for her absent brother who is presumed to be dead. She laments and suffers greatly at his absence. In Weil's reading "Electra is the human soul exiled upon earth, fallen into affliction and Orestes is the Christ...." (ICAG 11-17).

attitude," John notes, "is not the hallmark of self-denial and nakedness of spirit but the indication of a spiritual sweet tooth....It happens that, when some of this solid, perfect food...is offered them in dryness, distaste, and trial, they run from it as from death and wander about in search only of sweetness and delightful communications from God."⁵⁰ In the language of Weil, these enemies of Christ flee from their own mortality and from confronting the dark, painful face of existence.

In John of the Cross this sense of the dark night or void is interpreted in light of the abandonment of Christ at the cross.

Second, at the moment of His death he was certainly annihilated in His soul, without any consolation or relief...He was thereby compelled to cry out: *My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?* This was the most extreme abandonment, sensitively, that He had suffered in His life...The Lord achieved this, as I say, at the moment in which He was most annihilated in all things: in His reputation before people, since in beholding Him they mocked Him instead of esteeming Him; in His human nature, by dying; and in spiritual help and consolation from His Father, for He was forsaken by His Father...⁵¹

John of the Cross concludes that this path of the cross is at the heart of mystical union with God. "This union is the most noble and sublime state attainable in this life. The journey, then, does not consist in recreations, experiences, and spiritual feelings, but in the living, sensory and spiritual, exterior and interior, death of the cross."⁵²

In John of the Cross the dark night is marked by the sense of God's hiddenness and absence. Affliction and anguish are results of God's hiddenness. In relation to all the faculties, the intellect is left in darkness, the will in an arid state, and the memory in

⁵⁰The Ascent of Mount Carmel, Book 2, Chapter 7, op.cit., 95.

⁵¹ibid, 97.

⁵²ibid, 97-98.

emptiness.⁵³ The sense of God's hiddenness or absence in the form of affliction, then, is central to the dark night of John of the Cross and the theology of Luther. I would contend that it is also central to Weil's understanding of the void. With these three thinkers, in addition to the confession in Christ Crucified, the struggle of Job in the face of affliction and torment pervades their thought and sensibility. The critique of idolatry at this level is directed against any experience or concept which would obscure or conceal the fact of human suffering. Job's sorry comforters are guilty of this, as Weil notes. "Job's friends allowed compensatory imagination to function in them; this is criminal. It is a manner of averting the eyes" (NB 287). As we will see in chapter five, for Simone Weil a culprit of this idolatry is some modern theodicies.

In this light, the void is the recognition of the hiddenness of God in the face of affliction. "The absence of good, or rather the feeling of its absence, is affliction" (FLNB 242). In a fragmentary sentence in her notebooks, Weil writes: "A representation of the world including a void, so that the world may have need of God" (FLNB 161; also NB 148). This sense of the hiddenness of God (void) is necessary to help us recognize our lives in the darkness of the cave. Awareness of the void comes to interrupt our complacency, comfort, and apathy in the cave. As with Kierkegaard, Weil insists that Christ brings the sword not peace in order to interrupt our compromises with society

⁵³The Dark Night, Book 2, Chapter 3, op.cit., 199. As we will see in chapter five, one further issue which is shared by John and Simone is the insistence that affliction cannot be reduced to sin. Individuals who do so are acting in the manner of Job's sorry comforters. In John's words: "It will happen to individuals that while they are being conducted by God along a sublime path of dark contemplation and aridity, in which they feel lost, they will meet someone in the midst of the fullness of their darkness, trials, conflicts, and temptations who, in the style of Job's comforters, will proclaim that all of this is due to melancholia, depression, or temperament, or to some hidden wickedness, and that as a result God has forsaken them." (The Ascent of Mount Carmel, Prologue, op.cit., 59).

(‘Christendom’ in Kierkegaard) (WFG 198). The void destroys all the idols which avert our gaze from affliction and obscure our exiled plight.

Thus, the need for the idea of the void in Simone Weil is based on an awareness of the harsh reality of affliction. The void is a reading of the *Deus Absconditus* (NB 148-49). Affliction, as we have already seen in the previous chapter, is the assault on the soul in all its parts, physical, social and psychological (SNLG 171). It produces not only the pain of physical suffering, but also the humiliating mark of a slave, self-disgust and social ignominy (NB 214-15). Simone Weil explicitly relates this to the dark night of John of the Cross. "The total renunciation of all prestige is what St. John of the Cross calls spiritual nakedness. By that alone one attains to God" (ICAG 136-37). Weil’s reading of the crucifixion of Christ is central to this spiritual nakedness. The martyrs, Weil avers, are distant from the spirit of Christ in that their deaths are covered in glory and prestige. The affliction of Christ on the cross, instead, is devoid of prestige and honor; it is the void. The essence of the passion of Christ is the absence of prestige, most apparent in the case of a criminal cut off from society. "He was ridiculed like those madmen who take themselves for kings; then he perished like a common criminal. There is a prestige belonging to the martyr of which he was entirely deprived. Also he did not go to his martyrdom in joy, but in a disarray of all the powers of the soul, after having vainly implored his Father to spare him and having vainly asked men to console him" (ICAG 138).

Weil interprets the just person of Plato’s *Republic* in light of a theology of the cross. The ideal person (who is just in reality and not merely in appearance) is the one who is

persecuted, tortured, and inflicted with all possible sufferings and, yet, continues to love justice (ICAG 138). The affliction of the just person "must be an affliction without consolation" (NB 211). An example of such a just person is Job. While in the vision of *Ecclesiastes* detachment occurs through the recognition of the insufficiency and transience of all worldly goods, in Job detachment occurs through a loss of such goods. In short, in the case of Job, the loss of worldly goods occurs as affliction. In this light, Weil writes that through renunciation we must not simply detach ourselves from all external goods, but "we must lose them--like Job" (NB 203). "In that case, to attain complete detachment, the soul must really suffer the equivalent of what Job experienced, or Christ on the cross" (NB 211). Complete detachment involves suffering. Since the apophatic tradition accentuates the theoretical critique of idols, this move toward a more explicit confrontation with suffering and cross is often underemphasized in the apophatic mystical tradition.⁵⁴

Since I have suggested that mysticism is not constituted by experience *per se*, especially extraordinary visionary or auditory experience, it is important to address one last issue regarding the experience of affliction in John of the Cross and Weil. Both Weil

⁵⁴The contrast between *Job* and *Ecclesiastes* raises an issue in regard to the central thesis of my last chapter on work and mysticism in Weil. The issue is the following: is there a contradiction between the claim that material conditions (external goods) are conditions for the possibility of mysticism (as soil for plants) and the claim that the mystical life is a complete voiding of all external goods? In the case of *Job*, and of poor and oppressed people, the problem is not so much the insufficiency and transience of worldly goods, but rather the lack of such goods. This is, indeed, a different perspective. For Simone Weil, however, the key is to create just conditions which will allow for a responsible consent to detachment and the void. Such a responsible consent presupposes a thoughtful self in order to lead to the decreation, rather than the destruction of the self. Decreation, one might say, occurs at a post-critical level from within, while destruction occurs at a pre-critical level from without. The significance of external goods is to create a society in which decreation, rather than destruction, will thrive. Creating just conditions is not constitutive of mysticism as such, but it is a part of the preparation for the consciousness of God.

and John of the Cross clearly understand suffering to be, in some way, a prominent aspect of the mystical life. Does this contradict my claim (and John's and Weil's!) that mysticism is not constituted by an experience as such? There are two important points in response. First, in the case of John the Cross, the actual experience of affliction *per se* is mute. In discussing the dark night, John asserts that understanding the trials is difficult. "Nor does experience of them equip one to explain them. Those who suffer them will know what this experience is like, but they will find themselves unable to describe it."⁵⁵ He then concludes that since experience can be unclear, Scripture must be our primary guide in the analysis of mysticism. Simone Weil makes a similar point. "The knowledge of affliction being by nature impossible both to those who have experienced it and to those who have not, it is equally possible for both of them by supernatural favor..." (SNLG 189). The key, for Weil, is attention and awareness. "The education of the attention--that is the chief thing" (NB 545). As we will see, then, attention is the key and it is dependent upon the gift of grace. Grace and love make possible a knowledge born of suffering. This is the 'moment' of mystical consciousness, what John calls faith.

Simone Weil was very well aware of the mute character of suffering as such. Far from romanticizing the workers as extraordinary and ethical persons, she noted how frequently their suffering led them to acts of thoughtlessness--in the intellectual and moral sense. She discovered in the factory that a general capacity for ideas was related to generosity (FW 226). The problem in the factory and other locations of oppression was

⁵⁵The Ascent of Mount Carmel. Prologue, op.cit. 57.

that affliction destroyed the possibility of a consciousness of God. Affliction *per se* does not automatically give rise to the mystical life. "Often, one could weep tears of blood to think how many unfortunates are crushed by affliction without knowing how to make use of it" (SNLG 198). The central task of mysticism is to foster an attention to the presence of force and suffering (void) in order for attention to God to become a possibility. In short, suffering becomes a preparation for the mystical life only when one is attentive. Then we can speak of suffering as a training; then is a knowledge born of suffering plausible (NB 128).

With this much said, then, it could be granted that suffering as an experience has a central role in the mystical life. There is a dialectic between the given experience of suffering and the attentive moment of interpretation. There is neither a pure experience nor a pure interpretation. The significance of suffering in John and Weil is, in this light, to train one in recognizing human misery and exile. In John's words: "The first and chief benefit that this dry and dark night of contemplation causes is the knowledge of the self and of one's own misery...which was not apparent during the time of its prosperity."⁵⁶ One is given a knowledge of one's misery, that is, of the lowliness, finitude and fragility of human nature.

In the thought of Weil, knowledge of our misery brings us to a knowledge of God. "We can only know one thing about God: that he is what we are not. Our misery alone is the image of this. The more we contemplate it, the more we contemplate Him" (NB 236). This contemplation of our misery is a moment of revelation. "There can be no

⁵⁶The Dark Night, Book 1, Chapter 12, op.cit., 189.

contemplation of human misery in its very truth otherwise than by the light of grace" (NB 405). This element is the dialectical component of Weil's thought, it is the recognition of the distance and non-identity between humanity and God. Such a graced recognition of human misery, however, is the path to union with God. "We unite ourselves to God in this way: we cannot approach him. Distance is the soul of beauty" (NB 615).

This knowledge of human misery is disclosed most poignantly in actual affliction. Here knowledge of human misery is not grasped at a theoretical and objective perspective. Affliction is a concrete, existential knowledge of human misery which is not apparent in the time of prosperity. Job, in Weil's reading, has this cognitive insight into reality. He is able "to view things in their nakedness, and without this fog of false values" (NB 553). This is a major reason for regarding the experience of suffering as a part of the mystical life. The further reason John and Simone both allow suffering a central place in their mystical thought is, finally, the confession that Christ crucified is the heart of mystical wisdom and insight. An attention to the cross is, thereby, less liable to deception than consoling experiences, visions, or locutions.

To summarize: the metaphors of void, darkness, nakedness, and detachment in Simone Weil are related to the following issues: 1)the critique of sensual and worldly idols; 2)the critique of experiential/conceptual idols; 3)affliction. Despite some important similarities, Weil takes her interpretation of affliction in a different direction from Luther and John of the Cross. The hiddenness of God in Weil is not merely a struggle with the

Anfechtung (Luther) or the depression (John of the Cross) of the individual self.⁵⁷ When John of the Cross, for example, speaks of the emptiness of memory in the dark night, Weil certainly would have expressed her approbation. Nevertheless, the destruction of memory is most brutally apparent in the oppressive rule of force in history and society for Weil. The hiddenness of God (void) is most striking in the faces of whole groups of poor and oppressed peoples. The victims of conquest, imperialism and totalitarianism; exploited workers; raped women; victims of war; marginalized traditions of spirituality: all are painful examples of the void. This attentiveness to suffering brings Weil close to the liberation theology of Gustavo Gutierrez.

Decreation

Insofar as awareness of the void is a moment of preparation for the consciousness of God it functions to deconstruct the idols of sensual and imaginative/conceptual attachments, on the one hand, and the idols that avert our gaze from affliction and conceal from view the hiddenness of God, on the other. Simone Weil interprets this moment of the void as both a preparation for and an actual consciousness of God. In the former case, the detachment from the idols is a stage in the direction of God's iconic manifestation, but still awaits God's presence. "There is a period when the soul is already

⁵⁷The contrast that I have noted between decreation and destruction in Simone Weil is similar to the contrast between the dark night and depression in John of the Cross. The major difference is that Simone Weil extends the analysis of destruction to include the oppressive effects of force and violence in history and society. In regards to Luther, I would say that his understanding of the hiddenness of God is not simply individualistic, even if faith is a personal struggle. In the Bondage of the Will, for example, the hidden God is faced as an honest attempt to deal with the injustices of history and nature. The injustices of history and nature (i.e., that the wicked prosper and the good suffer) has led the great minds, Luther says, to deny the existence of God and to imagine that "chance governs all things at random" See Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings trans. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor Books, 1962) 201.

detached from the world without being yet able to attach itself to God: void, terrible anguish. (Dark Night.)" (NB 215). This is the stage of non-belief in which the soul still awaits God's self-disclosure. "It does not rest with the soul to believe in the reality of God if God does not reveal this reality" (WFG 211). Decreation, however, is the culminating point of void, detachment, spiritual nakedness and dark night in Simone Weil. It is the breakthrough to God *via* knowledge of the misery and nothingness of the self as well as the awareness of the presence of affliction and force in history and nature. In other words, at the level of decreation we can say that the void is no longer a mere preparation for the consciousness of God, but instead is an actual breakthrough to God-consciousness.

"Knowledge of the self is knowledge of God" (NB 282). Such an idea has a rich history in Christian mysticism arising from the interpretation of the Socratic maxim, 'Know Thyself'. For Christian thinkers, knowledge of self should lead us to an acknowledgement of our need for God. Trapped in original sin, the self has a will that is curved upon itself and that arrogates to itself what is a gift from God. In an Augustinian manner, Bernard of Clairvaux, for instance, maintains that knowledge of both the misery and grandeur of the human condition is crucial for the restoration of our fallen nature and, consequently, for knowledge of God. Humility is that graced virtue which enables us to recognize the nothingness and misery of the human person.⁵⁸ For John of

⁵⁸Bernard insists that arrogance born of ignorance (of self) is the most dangerous sin. "This arrogance born of the last ignorance is worse and more dangerous because while the second kind of ignorance causes us to ignore God, this leads us to despise him...It is pride, the greatest sin, to use gifts you have been given as though you were born with them, and to arrogate to yourself the glory which belongs to the generous giver." See On Loving God, Chapter 2.6, in Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works trans. Gillian Evans (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 177. In a similar manner Pascal notes that conversion to God occurs through self-annihilation and

the Cross, also, the 'dark night' leads to a self-knowledge in which the self "considers itself to be nothing and finds no satisfaction in self..."⁵⁹ In an analogous fashion, the knowledge of the self for Simone Weil is the insight into the nothingness and illusory character of the autonomous self. This insight is a divine knowledge and, indeed, a form of contact with God. "To become something divine, I have no need to get away from my misery, I have only to adhere to it" (FLNB 83). In creation, God renounced God's autonomous control and possession of history and nature. In order to imitate the nothingness of God, we must be willing to die to all that constitutes the ego. Sin, in this light, is the unwillingness to let-go our clinging, possessive self (FLNB 218). Sin is the failure to recognize human wretchedness. The more we contemplate our wretchedness, the more we contemplate God (GG 110). "To consent to being a creature and nothing else. It is like consenting to lose one's whole existence" (FLNB 217).

Since the discussion of this negation of autonomy in Simone Weil is well known and has been explored by many scholars, I would like to focus on a neglected feature of decreation in Simone Weil, namely, the assimilation to God through justice.⁶⁰ A comparison with Meister Eckhart will be useful for understanding Weil's notion of justice. Meister Eckhart claims that the just person, insofar as she or he is just, is perfectly equal

recognition of human nothingness or misery. "True conversion consists in self-annihilation before the universal being whom we have so often vexed...It consists in knowing that there is an irreconcilable opposition between God and us, and that without a mediator there can be no exchange." See his Pensees trans. A.J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin Books, 1966) 137.

⁵⁹The Dark Night Book 1, Chapter 12, op.cit., 190.

⁶⁰For good discussions of Weil on decreation see Miklos Veto, The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil (Albany: State University of New York, 1994) chapter one.

to justice. Who is the just person for Eckhart? Answer:

Those who have wholly gone out of themselves, and who do not seek for what is theirs in anything, whatever it may be, great or little...who are not desiring possessions or honors or ease or pleasure or profit or inwardness or holiness or reward or the kingdom of heaven, and who gone out from all of this, from everything that is theirs.⁶¹

The just person is the detached and annihilated person. The will of the just person is annihilated and no longer controlled by the interests and desires of the self. "The just have no will at all; what God wills is all the same to them..."⁶²

What is particularly interesting is Eckhart's claim that the just person is 'equal to nothing'.⁶³ In this case, equality is a defining feature of justice and is associated with the nothingness of the detached self. She who is 'equal to nothing' is not only equal to the male gender, but also equal to the nothingness of the Godhead. In Eckhart's words:

When God made man, he made woman from man's side, so that she might be equal to him. He did not make her out of man's head or his feet, so that she would be neither woman nor man for him, but so that she might be equal. So should the just soul be equal with God and close beside God, equal beside him, not beneath or above. Who are they who are thus equal? Those who are equal to nothing, they alone are equal to God. The divine being is equal to nothing, and in it there is neither image nor form...It should desire or heed its own honor, its profit and whatever may be its own, no more than what is a stranger's.⁶⁴

The just person who is equal to nothing is detached from images and forms (idols), including the idol of the self. In this regard, the just person has no will of its own

⁶¹German Sermons, Sermon 6, op.cit., 185.

⁶²ibid, 186.

⁶³I was helped much by the discussion of justice in Eckhart by Michael Sells in his book Mystical Languages of Unsayng (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) especially chapter six.

⁶⁴German Sermons, Sermon 6, op.cit., 187.

and no preference for itself over the interests and needs of strangers. Eckhart suggests that the Father then gives birth to the Son within such a 'virgin' soul. Indeed, Eckhart insists that, insofar as one is just, the soul passes over from its creaturely status (the realm of analogical *ebullitio*) into union with God (the inner-Trinitarian realm of univocal *bullitio*). One is then completely one with the God beyond God, where God's ground and my ground are the same ground. "You ought to sink down out of all your your-ness, and flow into his his-ness, and your 'yours' and his 'his' ought to become one 'mine', so completely that you with him perceive forever his uncreated is-ness, and his nothingness, for which there is no name."⁶⁵ In loving God as nothingness, as a non-God, non-spirit, non-person, non-image, we worship God as pure naked Unity and "sink down, out of 'something' into 'nothing'."⁶⁶

In Eckhart's Latin works, he discusses the relationship of the just person to justice in a very similar way. He claims that the just person is the word of justice, the form by which justice expresses and manifests itself.⁶⁷ In this case, the just person is begotten by justice. Insofar as he or she is begotten by justice, the just person is distinct from and yet, one with justice. They are distinct as persons and one in nature. "If the Father and the Son, justice and the just man, are one and the same in nature, it follows in the seventh place that the just man is equal to justice, not less than it, nor is the Son less than the

⁶⁵German Sermons, Sermon 83, *ibid*, 207.

⁶⁶*ibid*, 208.

⁶⁷Latin Works, Commentary on John, Chapter 1.15. *op.cit.*, 126-27.

Father."⁶⁸ The just person, insofar as she is just, is eternally born of, and one in nature with, God.

If in Eckhart the just person is the detached, annihilated self who is 'equal to nothing' (the nothingness of the Godhead and justice), for Simone Weil the decreated person is, likewise, the just person. The decreated person is the (materially and spiritually) naked and detached spirit. In her reading of the just person in Plato's Republic, the just person is devoid of prestige, "naked without honor, divested of all the brilliance which the reputation of justice gives" (ICAG 142). The decreated-just person has renounced his will and no longer sees himself as the center of all desires and values. "To give up our imaginary position as the center, to renounce it, not only intellectually but in the imaginative part of our soul, that means to awaken to what is real and eternal..." (WFG 159). The just person accepts the void, therefore, and awakens to the reality of justice. The decreated just person gives up his imaginary position at the center in order to be attentive to Others.

Weil claims that the true just person will thus be assimilated to justice. "Just (or righteous) men are simply very close to justice itself, they have a very large share in it. But in order that a man 'in no way differs from justice itself', should be the same in all respects as justice, 'divine Justice, from beyond the skies, must descend upon earth'" (ICAG 140). Assimilation to God occurs through the just person (ICAG 139). For Weil, the just person who descends upon earth is none other than the Christ: he who suffered, died, and was buried as a consequence of his justice. "During the days when Christ was,

⁶⁸ibid, 127.

as Plato would have him, completely stripped of all appearance of justice, even his friends themselves were no longer wholly conscious of his being perfectly righteous" (ICAG 142). The model for the decreeted-just person is explicitly Christ on the cross in Weil, which is not the case in the mystical thought of Eckhart.

The incarnation of Justice in Christ is the model for the human assimilation to God through justice. "Plato says in the *Theaetetus* that justice is assimilation in God...Whoever is just becomes to the Son of God as the Son is to His Father" (ICAG 159). While this sounds a lot like Eckhart, Weil qualifies this remark by asserting that an identity of relations is not possible between humanity and God (ICAG 159). "When Plato speaks of assimilation in God, it is no longer a question of resemblance, for no resemblance is possible, but one of proportion. No proportion is possible between men and God except by mediation. The divine model, the perfectly just man, is the mediator between just men and God" (ICAG 141).⁶⁹ By defending language of 'proportion' rather than 'resemblance' Weil hopes to preserve the *viator* status of humanity. The difference between humanity and God is not collapsed into simple identity.

As suggested in the above quote, moreover, the incarnation of Justice is a condition for our assimilation to God through justice. In Eckhart, too, Justice has to become incarnated in order for us to have knowledge of it. "If justice did not justify, no one would have knowledge of it, but it would be known to itself alone, as in the text: 'No one has ever seen God; the Only-Begotten who is in the Father's heart has made him known'

⁶⁹In another text Weil asserts that through decreation the soul becomes "the same thing as the soul of the divine Persons..." (FLNB 132). Here she seems to imply that the soul is taken up into the relations of the Trinity. She continues that, in this life, such a possibility is very rare and brief. The exiled nature of human life permits nothing more.

(Jn. 1:18)."⁷⁰ For Eckhart and Weil the incarnation of Justice occurs eternally through all just persons, insofar as they are just. Both would agree that a knowledge of justice is possible only in the form of a participation in justice, by realizing justice in one's life. In contrast to Eckhart, however, Weil insists that perfect example of justice is not merely in the incarnation, but in the crucifixion of the just person!

Thus, the afflicted just person is the model for decreation in Simone Weil. The decreed person is detached and naked from all idols either of an experiential, imaginative/conceptual nature, on the one hand, and from idols which divert our gaze from human affliction and the hiddenness of God, on the other. Decreation is the mystical consciousness that we are 'equal to nothing'. Weil relates this to humility: "Humility with the object of assimilation to God...I cannot bear to be less than God; but in that case I have got to be nothing..." (NB 120). Assimilation to Justice, thus, occurs through a humility which renounces the will-to-power and the illusion that we are the center of all space, time, and values. It is through a just life which faces the void that a vision of God is a possibility.

Attention, Contemplation and Love

At its highest level attention is an ecstatic vision of God. Such a *theoria* or contemplation is a passive reception of God's self-manifestation as love. This brings a new consciousness of God, self and cosmos. Attention, however, needs to be trained and exercised in order to discern God's presence in history and nature. In this section I hope

⁷⁰Latin Works, Commentary on John, Chapter 1.15. op.cit., 127.

to show the meaning of attention in Weil in relation to spiritual exercises of an intellectual, aesthetical and ethical nature. The limitations of active exercises of the will, however, makes obvious the requisite passivity, vigilance and openness in attention. The passive character (negative effort) of attention owes much to the fact that in Weil attention is motivated and inspired by desire and love. Will-power alone cannot compel a consciousness of God to emerge; grace is indispensable. The iconic manifestation of God as love brings about a transformation of consciousness and leads to a new way of life in the face of Divine mystery.

In the previous section we have seen that void, dark night, detachment and decreation all lead to a profound awareness of the estranged or exiled character of human life. The destruction of all idols which conceal both the transcendence and hiddenness of God is a central task of Weil's mystical vision. The reflections of that section, of course, should inform the reading of attention. In order to cultivate attention, Weil claims, the purgation, emptying and voiding of the mind and spirit is necessary. Work plays an important role in this task, as we saw in chapter two. As the void makes evident the exiled character of human life (the 'not yet' character of the eschaton for Christians), attention makes manifest human participation in the cosmos as our home (the 'already' character of the eschaton for Christians). The cultivation of this analogical vision inherent to attention is important to enable the human person to face the void in a decreative rather than destructive manner. Facing the void entails a risk. With attention, the possibility of passing over to the decreative state instead of the destructive, nihilistic stage is greatly enhanced.

An analysis of Weil's notion of attention is imbued with an analogical vision, which will be evident by an examination of attention in relation to the realms of truth, beauty and good. At the highest level, these realms are fused and transformed by a vision of God. At this stage, the active will is displaced by the dynamic presence of God's grace.

At the outset, attention is prepared by a voiding of the mind, body and spirit. True attention can emerge only when the idols of the senses, imagination and intellect are detached and decreated.⁷¹ "Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object..." (WFG 111). The void functions to empty attention. If attention is not prepared in such a way, the possibility of idolatry emerges. "Those who are incapable of such an attention do not think of God, even if they give the name of God to what they are thinking of..." (NB 515). Such idols block the manifestation of grace.

The emptying of attention, by facing the void, leads to decreation. Decreation is at the heart of attention for Weil. In this sense, Weil claims that attention is the "highest ecstasy" (NB 515). True attention takes us outside of ourselves (decreation) and makes accessible to us wisdom beyond the grasp of the ego. The cross of Christ is a key model for this selfless act of attention. "There is not, there cannot be, any human activity in whatever sphere, of which Christ's Cross is not the supreme and secret truth" (SNLG 195-96). The renunciation of the self is central to attention. This includes a renunciation of

⁷¹This is true also of what John of the Cross calls 'loving attention'. The memory, will, and intellect must be purged in order to make room for hope, love, and faith.

the illusory belief that we are the center of space, time or at the center of all values. The decentering of the human person makes possible love of truth, love of the beauty of the world and love of neighbor (ICAG 175). Attention to these spheres begins with the recognition that they are truly Other than the projections of my desires, wants, needs, etc.. In relating this decentering and decentering to justice, Weil writes: "Justice. To be continually ready to admit that another person is something other than what we read when he is there (or when we think about him)" (NB 43,200). For Weil, this interpretation concerning ethics equally pertains to attention in the realms of truth and beauty.⁷²

"Attention alone--that attention which is so full that the 'I' disappears--is required of me. I have to deprive all that I call 'I' of the light of my attention and turn it on to that which cannot be conceived" (NB 179, 291). Thus, the voiding, emptying and decentering of the self (ecstasy) is a necessary condition for the possibility of true attention. The idols must be deconstructed in order to prepare the way for the attentive reception of God.

It is clear that attention includes all the human domains of truth, beauty, good, and at the highest level, God. "Pure, intuitive attention is the only source of perfectly beautiful art, truly original and brilliant scientific discovery, of philosophy which really aspires to wisdom and of true, practical love of one's neighbor (MA 253). Attention cannot be isolated to any one realm of human experience. Indeed, the sin of polytheism is for her the separation of truth, beauty and good (NFR 241). What is extraordinary about genius, Weil contends, is the ability of genius to shed light on all these spheres of

⁷²I certainly think that it is appropriate to consider Weil in relation to the hermeneutical thinkers. Attention to an-Other may include a person, text, event, myth, symbol, narrative, etc.. Her notion of 'reading' certainly would agree with the hermeneutical insistence on the interpretation mediated character of all reality and experience. See NB pp. 23,39,43,45.

human life. "There exists a focal point of greatness where the genius creating beauty, the genius revealing truth, heroism and holiness are indistinguishable" (NFR 224). Thus, Weil can assert that all forms of true attention are only debased forms of religious attention (i.e., contemplation and prayer) (NB 515).

We must remember that love and desire are central to attention, not will-power or pure intellectual activity. "We confer upon objects and upon persons around us all that we have of the fullness of reality when to this intellectual attention we add that attention of still higher degree which is acceptance, consent, love (ICAG 188). "What could be more stupid than to tighten up our muscles and set our jaws about virtue, or poetry, or the solution of a problem? Attention is something very different" (NB 205). Attention, she concludes, is dependent upon inspiration and grace. For this reason attention cannot be reduced to science, aesthetics, or ethics. Attention includes these elements, but "attention animated by desire is the whole foundation of religious practices" (WFG 197). This is what distinguishes religion from the above three realms.⁷³ Thus, one must first exercise the attention and, then, when the limits have been reached all one can do is long and desire for what lies beyond (NB 527). While attention is first an active preparation for mystical consciousness, at its highest moment it is the reception of God's self-manifestation as love.

Such a reception of the self-manifestation of God requires nothing less than God's

⁷³Levinas also insists that religion is desire. Infinity is not the object of desire, but rather that which arouse desire. Infinity is thus manifested through provoking one's desire. Desire yearns excessively and insatiably for the Good beyond Being. This Good beyond Being is located nowhere else than in the face of the mysterious, irreducible Other. Totality and Infinity (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969) 62-64, 80, 117, and elsewhere.

grace in Weil's opinion. An awareness of the indispensable role of grace in human life is at the heart of Weil's mystical thought. Since decreation is a moment of the loss of self, Weil argues that decreation is dependent upon something other than the self. "I must necessarily turn to something other than myself since it is a question of being delivered from self. Any attempt to gain this deliverance by means of my own energy would be like the efforts of a cow which pulls at its hobble and so falls on its knees" (GG 3). The sin of pride emulates the natural law of gravity and shuns the supernatural law of grace (GG 105). In this case, pride scorns the need for an-Other, for something outside of one's self. Obedience to gravity follows the dictates of self-interest and survival of the fittest. The natural law of history ordains that the powerful rule the weak, Weil notes in reference to Thucydides (WFG 141). The only force that is an exception to this natural law is the miraculous force of grace. Even when given the means and power to rule, compassion animated by grace refuses control and renounces the will-to-power (WFG 148). In this light, humility is inspired by grace and is indispensable to attention.

A sense of human belonging and participation in the cosmos is also an important part of the mystical life (leading to a vision of God) for Simone Weil. She gives an important role to the faculty of vision. Her deep love of art and the beauty of the world led her to insist that salvation occurs by looking (WFG 193). Following Plato, Weil insists that a true understanding of vision makes clear the necessity of love in addition to intellectual comprehension. *Theoria* (vision of God or contemplation) is only possible when attention is illuminated by faith and love. "Human thought and the universe constitute the books of revelation *par excellence*, if the attention, lighted by love and

faith, knows how to decipher them" (ICAG 201). God's revelation is deciphered through loving attention. Such attention makes possible the ascent of the soul to God. At the highest level, then, attention is prayer, contemplation and a graced vision of God.

Intellectual Attention

While a mystical consciousness of God is finally inspired by love and contemplation, the intelligence has an important role to prepare for the ascent to God (SL 139). One of the major parts that intelligence plays in the mystical vision of Simone Weil is to check an illegitimate use of mystery. The intellect performs a critical function in clearing the ground of illusory and fantastic mysteries (idols), in order to make possible a reception of legitimate mystery (icons).

The notion of mystery is legitimate when the most logical and most rigorous use of the intelligence leads to an impasse, to a contradiction which is inescapable...Then, like a lever, the notion of mystery carries thought beyond the impasse, to the other side of the unopenable door, beyond the domain of the intelligence and above it. But to arrive beyond the domain of the intelligence one must have travelled all through it, to the end, and by a path traced with unimpeachable rigor (FLNB 131).

Central to the rigorous use of the intellect in Simone Weil is school studies, including geometry, philosophical dialectics, language translations, recitation of poetry, etc.. All forms of study are to be training in attention. "Since prayer is but attention in its pure form, and since studies constitute a gymnastic of the attention, it follows that every school exercise should be a refraction of spiritual life" (NB 597). As with the Stoics, the gymnastics of attention is central to Weil's understanding of the philosophical life. The actual exercise of the attention is, for Weil, a preparation for attention to God.

The critique of the illegitimate use of mystery has a demand for blind assent to Church dogma as its target. The demand for such an assent (fideism) results in the gagging of the intelligence (LTP 39). Worse yet, the reduction of articles of faith and belief to perfunctory assent or denial is idolatrous to Simone Weil. "The dogmas of the faith are not things to be affirmed. They are things to be regarded from a certain distance, with attention, respect and love...This attentive and loving gaze, by a shock on the rebound, causes a source of light to flash in the soul which illuminates all aspects of human life on this earth" (LTP 48). The confessions of Christian belief become idols when they are reduced to objective and theoretical objects of predication. Idolatry in relation to mystery, therefore, is the reification of mystery in the form of perfunctory assent or denial. The path to faith is, rather, through a loving attention which realizes the Christian mysteries by living them.

Peter Winch makes an interesting comparison of this aspect of Weil to Ludwig Wittgenstein. Winch quotes Wittgenstein in the following words: "Actually I should like to say that...the *words* you utter or what you think as you utter them are not what matters, so much as the difference they make at various points in your life...A theology which insists on the use of *certain particular* words and phrases, and outlaws others, does not make anything clearer...*Practice* gives the words their sense."⁷⁴ Thus, for both Weil and Wittgenstein the utterance of particular words or phrases is not what constitutes Christian faith. When Christian orthodoxy is defined by such dogmatic assent, then the idolizing

⁷⁴See Peter Winch, Simone Weil: The Just Balance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 209-210. This quote is taken from Ludwig Wittgenstein, Culture and Value trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 85e.

of what can only be shown in the form of certain words and phrases naturally follows. The intellect, however, is important in clearly and coherently stating what can be said. Again in the words of Wittgenstein: "What can be said at all can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent...There is indeed the inexpressible. This *shows* itself; it is the mystical."⁷⁵ Weil always insists that matters within the powers of the human mind should be examined with rigor and thoroughness. Along these lines, then, meditation on doctrine and philosophical dialectics performs the function of training the attention. Regarding legitimate mystery beyond the limits of the human mind, however, the intellect is most iconic when it recognizes its limits and silences itself. Thus, intellectual exercises in Simone Weil performs an important function in preventing an appeal to mystery from becoming a cloak for careless and incoherent thought. When this idolatrous form of mystery is deconstructed, then a more divine iconic form of mystery will emerge.

Philosophical dialectics, for example, plays an important role in training intellectual attention and in checking illegitimate mystery. For Simone Weil, dialectics is a critical investigation of a fundamental question, problem or issue which "gives an account of the process of thought itself" (LP 221). While Plato never defined dialectics, Weil says, it is clear that it must involve a passion for truth and a critical suspicion of popular opinions and prejudices (LP 221). More specifically, essential to Plato's dialectics is contradiction and analogy (NB 46). A respect for different, even contradictory, 'readings' of reality is

⁷⁵This quote is taken from the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus trans. D.F. Pears and B. McGuinness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961). See Art Monk's biography of Wittgenstein entitled The Duty of Genius (New York: Penguin Books, 1990) 156 for a good description of this element of Wittgenstein.

clearly important in Weil's interpretation of Platonic dialectics. Intellectual honesty and integrity demands that a philosophical dialectician admit the validity of other positions in order for a true dialogue to occur (e.g., hermeneutics). Intolerance to other interpretations than one's own is yet another form of idolatry masking an arrogant claim to absolute knowledge. Such intolerance is another example of the illusory belief that we occupy the center of space, time and values. Too often it leads to the subjugation of different readings of reality.

Examples of a subjugation of different readings of reality are slavery and conquest. "To force somebody to read himself as you read him (slavery). To force others to read you as you read yourself (conquest)" (NB 43). Dialectics effects a purification of the soul by decentering the ego. In her notebooks, Weil writes concerning dialectics: "A center from which may be seen the different possible readings--and their relationship--and our own only as one among them" (NB 47). This purification of attention is, in the thought of Weil, a detachment and decreation of the ego.

The various readings of reality in Weil's interpretation of dialectics does not, however, lead to a belief in relative, incommensurable truth. "Truth: many readings at once? an infinite number? but *readings*, not just opinions..." (NB 45). Insofar as an interpretation of reality is a genuine reading, and not mere opinion or prejudice, a relationship can be established among the various readings. The relationship to be established between the various interpretations of reality is possible because of the common *logos* shared by all humanity. Here analogy becomes a prominent feature in Weil's interpretation of Platonic dialectics. "There is but one single and identical reason

for all men; they only become estranged from and impenetrable to each other when they depart from it..." (OL 99). Critical analysis (dialectics) should lead to a sense of our common humanity. By doing so, a reaffirmation of our common pact between the mind and the universe is made possible (OL 124).

A more obvious analogical element is present in another form of intellectual training for Weil, namely, the study of geometry. In the case of geometry, Weil maintains that the ancient Greek Pythagoreans saw geometry as a purification of the soul. The implication that there is proportion, order, and form in the cosmos was central to ancient geometry, Weil claims. The purification of the soul was the method by which the kinship between the mind and the order of the universe was re-established. "It is for the Greeks that mathematics was really an art. It had the same purpose as their art, to reveal palpably a kinship between the human mind and the universe, so that the world is seen as 'the city of all rational beings'" (SL 118). In this sense, math has the primary purpose of imitating the impersonal God infused in the cosmos, namely, the divine Logos or Soul of the world (the 'eternal geometer' in Weil's words). In short, for Weil geometry is a form of analogy which helps to foster a sense of the mind's participation in the cosmos (NB 9). For this reason, the final goal of science is the "Wisdom of the universe. Science has as its object the study and the theoretical reconstruction of the order of the world--the order of the world in relation to the mental, psychic, and bodily structure of man" (WFG 169). Intellectual training, in this light, is a cultivation of analogy and an attention to the form of the cosmos.

In short, a critical and thoughtful reflection is to make evident both the possibilities

and limits of intellectual thought. In Weil, geometry and science train the attention and reveal the possibilities of human thought. Weil had hoped that the workers, in particular, would be able to cultivate their attention to become more critical thinkers. Rigorous, critical reflection is a condition for the possibility of mysticism in the thought of Simone Weil. By checking illusory and mindless appeals to mystery, a reception of true mystery would be credible. "Only the intelligence must recognize by those means which are proper to it, namely, verification and demonstration, the preeminence of love. It must only submit itself when it knows in a perfectly clear and precise manner why. Otherwise submission is an error, and that to which it submits itself, in spite of the label attached, is something other than supernatural love" (NB 240). Such a submission in error is idolatry.

Thus, just as a conceptual idea can function as an idol, so too can an idea act in the form of an icon. Analogy in Simone Weil is iconic insofar as it makes apparent the kinship of the human mind to the form and order of the universe. This iconic sense of participation is made possible, however, only after critical reflection deconstructs illusory appeals to mystery (as with the demand for blind assent to dogma (fideism)), on the one hand, and the illusory faith that the 'I' occupies the center of space, time, and values (void), on the other.

An exposure of the limits of the intellect is equally the goal in the training of attention. An idea is most iconic when through an exhaustive and coherent reflection, a self-negating methodology reveals the limits of intellect. When the intellect is exhausted a transgression beyond the intellect is imaginable. This transgression of the intellect is

love, faith and justice in Simone Weil. "The consented subordination of all the natural faculties of the soul to supernatural love is faith...In St. Paul faith and justice are constantly identified..." (FLNB 131). Faith, love, and justice bring about a new consciousness of truth unavailable to the discursive intellect.

For Simone Weil such a subordination of the intellect to love is a transformation of the intellect to a higher level, not an annulment of intellectual knowledge. In other words, love gives rise to a cognitive insight into reality. Love is not a mere experience of truth, then; rather, love educates the intellect in grasping truths which would have remained inaccessible to the discursive intellect. "When the intelligence, having become silent in order to let love invade the whole soul, begins once more to exercise itself, it finds it contains more light than before, a greater aptitude for grasping objects, truths that are proper to it. Better still, I believe that these silences constitute an education for it which cannot possibly have any other equivalent and enable it to grasp truths which otherwise would forever remain hidden from it" (LTP 59).

Aesthetical Attention

Simone Weil considers love for the beauty of the world a form of the implicit love of God (WFG 137). Love for another person is, in part, a desire to embrace universal beauty in a concrete, particular form. The desire to love the beauty of the world in a particular human person is nothing else, claims Weil, than the longing for the incarnation of the Logos or Wisdom of the universe (FLNB 83-84; also WFG 171). In this regard, the use of nuptial language by the mystics is a desire to be united with universal beauty.

Beauty plays a prominent role in the mystical vision of Simone Weil. In the brutal encounter with oppressive and destructive force, the soul is prevented from perceiving the wondrous beauty of the cosmos. "The soul that is prevented by circumstances from feeling anything of the beauty of the world...is invaded to its very center by a kind of horror" (WFG 168). The kinship between the human being and the universe is dissolved. "But to destroy cities, either materially or morally, or to exclude human beings from a city, thrusting them down to the state of social outcasts, this is to sever every bond of poetry and love between human beings and the universe. It is to plunge them forcibly into the horror of ugliness" (WFG 181). In this case, force destroys the possibility for mysticism.

"For anyone who possesses artistic and poetic culture and a keen sense of beauty the least deceptive analogies for illustrating spiritual truths are aesthetic analogies" (FLNB 361). Why is it that aesthetics provides the 'least deceptive' analogies concerning spiritual truths? I believe that the answer to that question is similar to the way in which Weil interprets the meaning of the past. In regard to beauty or the past, the proper attitude is one of attentive openness, silence, waiting and passivity. "The past--it forms part of the reality of this world...towards which we are unable to make a single step, towards which all we are able to do is to turn ourselves so that an emanation from it may come to us. For this reason it is the image *par excellence* of eternal, supernatural reality (Proust)" (NB 335). Beauty is ravaged when our attitude is of control and domination. Suspension of our controlling will is a condition for the reception of beauty or the past. The metaphors which Weil contrasts, in this regard, are looking and eating.

"It may be that vice, depravity, and crime are nearly always, or even perhaps always, in their essence, attempts to eat beauty, to eat what we should only look at" (WFG 166). Weil relates looking to contemplation and, ultimately, to love. In the case of contemplation and love, the recognition of the autonomy and integrity of the Other should determine our attitude towards it (i.e., towards beauty, the past, another person, text, event, image etc.). The renunciation of the will and ego is necessary for allowing the Other to manifest itself. With regard to the beauty of the world, the decreation of the self (as an illusory center of space) makes possible the reception of an iconic self-disclosure. In the case of St. Francis Weil explains, "Vagabondage and poverty were poetry with him; he stripped himself naked in order to have immediate contact with the beauty of the world" (WFG 166). The poverty and nakedness of the spirit (detachment, void, decreation) makes possible an immediate or direct contact with the beauty of the world. For Job, as well, the manifestation of beauty came only after the void stripped him of all his possessions (WFG 177).

The renunciation of the will in aesthetical attention implies that the reception of iconic beauty is absent of intentions, motives and utilitarian purposes. "Only beauty is not the means to anything else. It alone is good in itself, but without our finding any particular good or advantage in it" (WFG 166). "The imitation of the beauty of the world, that which corresponds to the absence of finality, intention, and discrimination in it, is the absence of intention in ourselves, that is to say the renunciation of the will" (WFG 178). When perfectly understood and realized, we are attracted toward beauty without a desire for possession. We are not in control of beauty, instead "it offers us its

own existence" (WFG 166).

Beauty is debased to an idol when it becomes an instrument of power, wealth and glory. Luxury is a kind of artificial beauty which is constructed with the interests of self-aggrandizement at its core. "In this case", Weil writes, "the question is one of forcing a certain circle into a pattern suggestive of universal beauty" (WFG 168). On the contrary, contact with iconic beauty is only possible when the will is annihilated.

The ultimately passive character of aesthetical attention does not, however, preclude the need for training or apprenticeship. The contemplation of the order and beauty of the universe trains one in the mystical life. Following Plato, Weil avers that such a training is an imitation of the circular patterns of the heavenly stars, planets, seasons, days and hours.⁷⁶ Weil believes that the peasants are potentially the best situated to perceive the rhythms of nature. Through fatigue, pain and joy in work the seasons and days enter the body (NB 21). Work restores both the kinship between the body and the soul, on the one hand, and the kinship between the human being and the cosmos, on the other.

An image of the circular patterns of the cosmos is the divine Trinity, Weil confesses (ICAG 96). Dance and music are also images of the circular character of time. By this process of contemplation, the notion of history as progress is undermined and along with it, the desires, intentions and motives of the will. "By contemplating this equivalence of the future and past we pierce through time right to eternity, and being delivered from desire oriented to the future, we are delivered also from the imagination which

⁷⁶Weil also says in this context that divination is predicated upon the patterns and order of nature. The other gifts given by Prometheus were reason, numbers, letters, medicine, the practical ability to build homes and domesticate horses, etc.. All such gifts presuppose some order and harmony in the universe. See Aeschylus, Volume Two tran. David Grene and Richard Latimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 155-56.

accompanies it and is the unique source of error and of untruth" (ICAG 96).

At the heart of this spiritual and aesthetical exercise is the idea of the Logos, says Weil. "Thus the Word is a model for man to imitate. Not in this case the Word incarnate in a human being, but the Word as the orderer of the world...Here is the source of the idea of microcosm and macrocosm which so haunted the Middle Ages" (ICAG 96). The human being as microcosm belongs and participates in the macrocosm. An apprenticeship is required to cultivate the sense of belonging in the universe. Weil suggests that this apprenticeship is analogous to a blind man learning to feel the external world through his stick. As an aesthetical analogy, Weil asserts that human persons must begin to sense our oneness with the cosmos as the blind man uses his stick. The universe itself, in other words, becomes an extension of our body (blind man's stick) (NB 19,60). If we succeed in cultivating this sense, then a purification of our own illusory sense of being in the center of the world may follow. "If, however, the universe is, as it were, another body to my soul, my death ceases to have any more importance for me than that of a stranger" (NB 19).

Even after mentioning that the contemplation of the beauty of the world is an apprenticeship, we would be misled if we concluded that it is simply an active effort. At best, attention is a negative effort, especially in regards to aesthetics. The origin of beauty is not controlled by the intentional self; beauty discloses itself. We can prepare for the manifestation of beauty, but the consciousness of beauty is pure gift. For this reason, Weil speaks of the seduction of beauty. The mystic is she or he who is seduced by the beauty of God. "The soul in quest of pleasure encounters the divine beauty which

appears here below in the form of the beauty of the world, as a snare for the soul. By the power of this snare, God seizes the soul in spite of itself" (ICAG 3). God captures and possesses the soul by beauty. This divine initiative becomes idolatrous when we seek to reverse this order and to ourselves capture and possess God by beauty (rape). We must attentively wait for the icon to show itself. When it does so, God enraptures the soul and carries her outside of herself.

Ethical-Political Attention

The third area in which Weil locates the manifestation of God is in the face of the neighbor, especially the afflicted neighbor. Attention to the afflicted is "a recognition that the sufferer exists, not only as a unit in a collection, or a specimen from the social category labeled 'unfortunate', but as a person, exactly like us, who was one day stamped with a special mark by affliction" (WFG 115). The face of an afflicted Other can be an icon in the thought of Simone Weil.⁷⁷ In order for this to be possible a miraculous kind of attention must emerge. Attention to the afflicted is miraculous insofar as it resists the natural reaction of revulsion to the disfigured, unattractive and naked face of the afflicted. "Thought is so revolted by affliction that it is as incapable of bringing itself voluntarily

⁷⁷While Levinas would not be considered an analogical thinker, he does interpret the manifestation of Infinity in the face of the Other as a kind of iconic manifestation. "The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*, we here name face. This mode does not consist in figuring as a theme under my gaze, in spreading itself forth as a set of qualities forming an image" (Levinas, *op.cit.*, 50). As with Marion's reading of the icon, the gaze isn't under the control of the self, but rather, in Levinas' words, "the gaze is precisely the epiphany of the face" (*ibid* 75). Thus, the face of the afflicted in Levinas and Weil is the location of the manifestation of the Good beyond Being. In Weil, this manifestation is iconic and not exclusive of aesthetics, however, as it is in Levinas. For Levinas, the face of the neighbor and not the beauty of the cosmos or artistic image is key. Levinas: "But it is a 'vision' without image, bereft of the synoptic and totalizing objectifying virtues of vision, a relation or an intentionality of a wholly different type..." (*ibid* 23).

to conceive it as an animal, generally speaking, is incapable of suicide" (SNLG 187). As an animalistic response, thought flees from attention to the afflicted. Thought seeks to evade confronting the truth of affliction by lies, consolations and illusions. Job's friends are guilty of such an evasion of affliction (NB 287). The lies concocted by the self are evasive maneuvers which seek to conceal the fact of our own human fragility and susceptibility to suffering. Facing the truth of affliction in another person becomes possible when we begin to die to ourselves. In order for attention to the poor and oppressed to be possible, a self-renunciation must empty and detach attention. "The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth. Only he who is capable of attention can do this" (WFG 115).

The major task before public structures and institutions, as well, is to heed the sigh of the oppressed creature (MA 53). The complacency of inaction is almost as culpable as causing suffering. "It is clear that to bring the full light of the attention to bear upon a state of suffering, to know that we can come to the aid of it, and not to do so, is like causing it" (NB 288). Reflection on social and political matters should be inspired by this kind of attention, argues Weil. For this reason, attention to the social mechanism plays an important role in the mysticism of Simone Weil. "Meditation on the social mechanism is in this respect a purification of the greatest value...*Contemplating* the social mechanism is as good a road to follow as withdrawing from the world" (NB 311). We have already seen, as with Eckhart, that the mysticism of Weil is not confined within the boundaries of inward prayer. Insofar as contemplation on the social mechanism is inspired by an

attentive openness to the afflicted, it is an important part of the mystical vision of Simone Weil.

A consciousness of God will only become fully realized through attention to the poor and oppressed neighbor. In this manner, Weil moves beyond the resources of the Greeks. In both intellectual and aesthetical attention, the Platonic and Stoic heritage is an important source for Weil. In regards to ethics, however, attention to God is more obviously related to the poor and afflicted neighbor. *Agape* enters into the picture in Weil's thought. Thus, the site of the iconic gift of God's self-disclosure is clear: it is at the cross.

Loving Attention and Divine Mystery

While truth, beauty, and the good are sites of God's manifestation, God cannot be reduced to these three spheres of human experience. Attention to truth, beauty, and the good is crucial as preparing for the vision of God. Nevertheless, attention has limits insofar as God cannot be reduced to a mere conceptual object of theoretical, aesthetical, or ethical attention. "Cases of true contradictories: God exists; God doesn't exist. Where lies the problem? No uncertainty whatever. I am absolutely certain that there is a God, in the sense that I am absolutely certain that my love is not illusory. I am absolutely certain that there is not a God, in the sense that I am absolutely certain that there is nothing real which bears a resemblance to what I am able to conceive when I pronounce

that name..." (NB 127).⁷⁸ Since God ultimately transcends all concepts, God is only present to human beings by love. God is a 'nothingness' that is "without name or form" (NB 232). Insofar as God is nothingness, knowledge of God is given to humanity only through contact with God. Along these lines, Andrew Louth insists that contemplation (*theoria*) is not simply knowledge *about*; "it implies identity with, participation in, that which is known."⁷⁹ Contemplation of God is nothing else than this contact and love of God (GG 110). At this level, the self-manifestation of God occurs through love.

Contemplation or vision of God (*theoria*) involves actual intellectual, aesthetical and ethical spiritual exercises for Simone Weil. The process of purification then gives way to an attentive waiting. "When the limit of attention has been reached in this way, one should fix the soul's gaze on that limit with the longing for that which lies beyond...Grace will accomplish the rest causing one to go up and emerge (from the cave)" (NB 527) (my addition). "Similarly, the true Good can only come from outside, never as the result of our own effort" (NB 531). The Good is strictly impossible for human effort; it is beyond the being of the world (NB 434). Contemplation of the Good beyond being may be prepared for (through void, detachment, dark night, attention), but finally it is pure gift. The centrality of grace surfaces conclusively here. The Good is never apprehended as a result of effort. Grace in the form of desire and love motivates the search for the Good and makes possible union with God. Likewise, truth is never discovered without grace.

⁷⁸Bernard McGinn has mentioned to me that this passage echoes the thought of Angela of Foligno, whom Simone Weil may have read.

⁷⁹See The Origins of the Christian Mvstical Tradition: From Plato to Denys (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) 2-3.

"Love is the teacher of gods and men, for no one learns without desiring to learn. Truth is sought not because it is truth but because it is good" (GG 107). In this prioritizing of good over truth, Weil maintains that knowledge of truth is dependent upon longing, yearning and desire for truth. In the form of grace, the Good provokes in us desire for truth. If we are able to wait with attention and silence, God will come to us. "The notion of grace, as opposed to virtue depending on the will, and that of inspiration, as opposed to intellectual or artistic work, these two notions, if they are well understood, show the efficacy of desire and of waiting" (WFG 197).

The significance of asserting that *theoria* is not simply a knowledge *about* God implies that God is inconceivable as a mere object of theory. "The object of my search is not the supernatural, but this world. The supernatural is the light. We must not presume to make an object of it, or else we degrade it" (NB 173). Since God is not an object of my search, the most appropriate language with regard to the transcendent is denial--*via negativa* (NB 254,357). The Good beyond being is, then, emptiness and void in relation to the being of the world. But it is an emptiness which "manifestly appears as the only reality that is truly real..."(NB 545,491). The insufficiency of objective and predicative language renders God inaccessible by such forms of knowledge. An engaged and participatory praxis in the world (love) is the only path to a consciousness of the reality of the emptiness or nothingness of God. Through love the contemplative knowledge of the Good beyond being is possible.

Simone Weil claims that the Good beyond being (God) is the only exception to the axiom that 'love requires an object to exist.' For God is not an object nor does God exist

"in our sense of existence" (FLNB 324). Thus, we must love God insofar as God is pure good without having to first be. "The good certainly does not possess a reality to which the attribute 'good' is added. It has no being other than this attribute. Its only being consists in being the good. But it possesses in fullness the reality of that being. It makes no sense to say the good exists or the good does not exist; one can only say: the good" (FLNB 316). Mystical *theoria* for Simone Weil is constituted and inspired by love. The iconic self-manifestation of God as Love effects a transformation of one's attention and consciousness that brings about faith.

For Simone Weil, faith is knowledge born of love. As in John of the Cross, faith is only possible when the experiential and conceptual idols have been emptied, on the one hand, and the idols which avert our eyes from affliction have been deconstructed, on the other. The dark night of faith makes possible the passage to mystical contemplation or prayer. In the case of John and Weil this is nothing else than, in John's words, a "loving attentiveness."⁸⁰ "For contemplation is nothing else than a secret...and loving inflow of God, which, if not hampered, fires the soul in the spirit of love..."⁸¹

As we have seen in Weil, faith is not dogmatic assent to certain words or phrases. Faith is love. "All that I conceive of as true is less true than these things of which I cannot conceive the truth, but which I love" (NB 238). Faith is the illumination of truth, beauty, and good by love. "Further, it is only insofar as the soul orients itself towards what ought to be loved, that is to say insofar as it loves God, that it is *qualified to know*

⁸⁰The Ascent of Mount Carmel Book 2, Chapter 12. op.cit., 108.

⁸¹The Dark Night Book 1, Chapter 10. op.cit., 186.

and understand" (SNLG 104). Simone argues that this is the proper understanding of Platonic vision.

The wisdom of Plato's philosophy is not, strictly speaking, a philosophical search for God by human reason, Weil asserts. In contrast to Aristotle, Plato's wisdom is nothing but the orientation of the eyes of the soul toward grace (ICAG 85). "It is a question here of something very different from such an abstract conception of God as the human intelligence may achieve without grace..." (ICAG 79). Knowledge of God, she continues, is at a different level altogether than intellectual (or aesthetical and ethical) achievement. Plato's wisdom makes evident that the basis for knowledge of God (*theoria*) is the iconic manifestation of love, namely, grace. Thus, sight for Plato means nothing else but love. "The sun is the good. Sight is then the faculty which is in relationship with the good. Plato, in the *Symposium*, says as definitely as possible that this faculty is love" (ICAG 134).

Mysticism as Reaction to the Consciousness of God

In this chapter we have seen that the mysticism of Simone Weil is a way of life which includes the critique of idols and the cultivation of attention. The culminating point of this theological idoloclasm is the decreative life of the just person. The deconstruction of idols makes possible through attention the reception of God's iconic self-manifestation as Love. Attention involves intellectual, aesthetical, and ethical-political exercises, but at its highest and most ecstatic moment attention is contemplative love and pure grace.

The mysticism of Simone Weil maintains that a knowledge of God is only possible through an engaged life entailing spiritual exercises and an openness to God's gift of love. The praxis of justice and love is central to the mystical life of Simone Weil. Such practices are not merely ethical, however; instead, they involve an apophatic critique of idols and the self-negating function of mystical language. In other words, justice and love make apparent the limits of objective predicative language, indeed, of all language in the face of Divine mystery. Justice and love are apophatic practices which indicate the non-objective character of God and, thus, necessitate an approach to God that proceeds otherwise. This way of life that proceeds otherwise consists of practices of justice as well as love of truth, beauty, good, and ultimately, God. In this light, *theoria* is prayerful contemplation which is not talk *about* God, but rather is an actual contact with God or, in other words, a consciousness of the presence of God.

The mystical way of life espoused by Simone Weil is one that is deeply in the world, but not of the world.⁸² In her words: "The soul which has attained to seeing the light must lend its vision to God and turn it on the world" (FLNB 269). The moment of re-descent or reaction to the consciousness of God is an important part of the Weil's mystical vision. Weil names this re-descent the return to the cave (LP 221). Central to this moment of Weil's mystical vision is the claim that "earthly things are the criterion of spiritual things" (FLNB 147). Explicitly repudiated is the claim that attention to God leads to a life unconcerned with earthly things. "The value of a religious or, more

⁸²"As a stage on the way, it is a good thing that in any activity there should be a part of the soul that remains withdrawn and concentrated in God, but it is not the end of the way. A very different relation is needed between world activity and the spiritual part of the soul. Every worldly activity should be so performed that there appears in it the meaning with which God created it" (FLNB 268).

generally, a spiritual way of life is appreciated by the amount of illumination thrown upon the things of the world" (FLNB 147). Terms such as God, justice, love, good, likewise, are only valid insofar as they illuminate our plight in history and nature, even if they are terms strictly inconceivable. "To use them legitimately one must avoid referring them to anything humanly conceivable and at the same time one must associate with them ideas and actions which are derived solely and directly from the light which they shed" (MA 77).

For Simone Weil, then, the validity of mysticism is dependent upon the quality of one's life following upon the consciousness of God. In imaginative metaphors suggestive of Eckhart she explains this point with regard to a pregnant woman.

The soul's attitude towards God is not a thing that can be verified, even by the soul itself, because God is elsewhere, in heaven, in secret. If one thinks to have verified it, there is really some earthly thing masquerading under the label of God. One can only verify whether the behavior of the soul as regards this world bears the mark of an experience of God. In the same way, a bride's friends do not go into the nuptial chamber; but when she is seen to be pregnant they know she has lost her virginity...When a person's way of behaving towards things and men, or simply his way of regarding them, reveals supernatural virtues, one knows that his soul is no longer virgin, it has slept with God...The only certain proof a young woman's friends have that she has lost her virginity is that she is pregnant. Otherwise there is no proof--not even if she should talk and behave lewdly...In the same way, if a soul speaks of God with words of faith and love, either publicly or inwardly, this is no proof either for others or for itself. It may be that what it calls God is...a false God and that it has never slept with God (FLNB 145-46).

Central to these rich reflections is the claim that mysticism cannot be reduced to a verifiable experience or doctrine about God. There is no proof for others or for oneself that one has slept with God, save the character of one's life. When one gives birth to others (Plato, Eckhart) one can be assured that one's consciousness of God is of the iconic not idolatrous God.

Talk about God *per se* does not constitute the mystical life. As Weil says, one can speak confidently and lewdly of sleeping with God. This in itself does not validate mysticism. In a statement suggestive of Wittgenstein, Weil asserts: "One cannot know what is in a man's mind when he speaks a certain word (God, freedom, progress...). One can only judge the good in his soul by the good in his actions, or in the expression of his original thoughts...It is not the way a man talks about God, but the way he talks about things of the world that best shows whether his soul has passed through the fire of the love of God. In this matter no deception is possible" (FLNB 144-45).

Interestingly, Weil uses metaphors of erotic love to illustrate this point. The Holy Spirit, she argues, is the breath of fire, the *pneuma*; it is the word of God (FLNB 287). The word of God is the divine seed which impregnates the human soul. In order for the soul to receive the word of God, the soul must be passive and attentive (FLNB 144-45). "How marvelously, therefore, this word applies both to the genital semen in carnal love and to the engendering of good by the love between God and a human soul!" (FLNB 350). This results, Weil asserts, in the birth of Christ within the soul and the decreation of the 'I'.

Then the seed becomes an embryo, and at last a child; Christ is born in the soul...That is what it is to be born anew...After this operation, 'I no longer live, but Christ lives in me'. It is a different being that has been engendered by God, a different 'I', which is hardly 'I', because it is the Son of God...Our soul is shut off from all reality by an enclosing skin of egoism, subjectivity, and illusion; the germ of Christ, placed in our soul by God, feeds on this; when it has grown enough it breaks the soul, explodes it, and makes contact with reality (FLNB 287-88).

The birth of Christ in the soul brings a greater fullness of reality than the illusion of subjectivity and egoism. One now lives for the sake of others without motives, intentions

and will. As in the thought of Eckhart, one's self has been displaced by the Father's begetting of Christ within the depths of the soul.⁸³

The new life following upon the birth of Christ in the soul is an existence for the good of others. "After that, there is a new creation, which the soul accepts--not for the sake of existing, since its desire is not to exist, but solely for the love of creatures..." (FLNB 224). The understanding of virtue as an obligation performed for a particular purpose or motive, even for God, is nullified. One loves and is just without a why. "That is why expressions such as to love our neighbor in God, or for God, are misleading and equivocal. A man has all he can do, even if he concentrates all the attention of which he is capable, to look at this small inert thing of flesh, lying stripped of clothing by the roadside. It is not the time to turn his thought toward God...There are times when thinking of God separates us from him" (WFG 151).

Simone Weil would certainly have affirmed Eckhart's following sentiment: "One should not accept or esteem God as being outside oneself, but as one's own and as what is within one; nor should one serve or labor for any recompense, not for God or for his honor or for anything that is outside oneself..."⁸⁴ For Eckhart, this is exemplified most poignantly by the just person. "For just men, the pursuit of justice is so imperative that

⁸³Eckhart suggests that the breakthrough to the ground of the soul is not only dependent upon detachment ('virginity'), but more significantly, upon becoming a fruitful wife and mother. "This virgin who is a wife brings this fruit and this birth about, and every day she produces fruit, a hundred or a thousand times, yes, more than can be counted, giving birth and becoming fruitful from the noblest ground of all--or, to put it better, from that same ground where the Father is bearing his eternal Word, from that ground is she fruitfully bearing with him" (German Sermons, Sermon 2, op.cit., 178-79). In a different and more daring fashion than Weil, Eckhart contends that through this breakthrough, God and the soul will be one. "Out of the purity he everlasting bore me, his only-born Son, into that same image of his eternal Fatherhood, that I may be Father and give birth to him of whom I am born" (German Sermons, Sermon 22, op.cit., 194).

⁸⁴German Sermons, Sermon 6, op.cit., 188.

if God were not just, they would not give a fig for God; and they stand fast by justice, and they have gone out of themselves so completely that they have no regard for the pains of hell or the joys of heaven or for any other thing."⁸⁵ The just person has no will and lives without a why.

In the vision of Simone Weil, this passion for justice is joined with an attentive love that inspires and forms the mystical life. This mystical life seeks the face of God by, first, deconstructing idols which conceal the true and hidden God, and second, by cultivating attention in thought and praxis. It is a mystical vision deeply immersed in the world even while not being of the world. The spiritual passivity and waiting does not translate into inaction, but on the contrary, to an intense worldly activity. One acts in a manner freed from the egoistic will. "To remain motionless does not mean to abstain from action. It is a spiritual, not material immobility. But one must not act, or indeed, abstain from acting, by one's own will...Their model is the crucifixion of Christ" (SNLG 154-55). Participation in the cross of Christ is at the heart of the mystical life of justice and attentive love. By confronting the void and destroying the false gods, the iconic birth of the Word in the soul is made possible.

⁸⁵ibid, 186.

CHAPTER FOUR

MYSTICISM AND LOVE IN THE THEOLOGY OF GUTIERREZ

While liberation theology is regularly declared to lack a spiritual or mystical element, Gustavo Gutierrez proves false such a claim by including a spiritual dimension at the heart of his theological project.¹ As early as his classic work *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutierrez has insisted that theology and spirituality must not be estranged from each other. Even if questions of poverty, oppression, and affliction form crucial cornerstones of liberation theology, Gutierrez contends that such a vision is not mutually exclusive of a spirituality. Indeed, without a spiritual dimension the struggle against injustice and oppression is in danger of lapsing into bitterness, resentment, and revenge, he contends (OJ 87-88). The spiritual dimension inspires the prophetic element by infusing the Christian life with the gratuitousness and beauty of God's love. The central

¹Carl Braaten, for example, claims that "liberation theology flattens out certain dimensions of Christian theology. Think of the liturgical and mystical dimensions of the Christian faith. The abysmal aspect in the experience of God as the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* is conspicuously absent in liberation theology" *The Apostolic Imperative* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985) 101. For this quote and my discussion of mysticism in liberation theology I have been aided by the dissertation of Gary Marshall, "The Mysticism of Liberation: The Mystical Theory of Encounter with God in Latin American Theology of Liberation," University of Chicago, 1995. His dissertation is a much needed work on the importance of mysticism in Latin American liberation theology.

task of this chapter is to consider both the traditional and novel elements of spirituality and mysticism in the thought of Gustavo Gutierrez.

The understanding of mysticism and spirituality in liberation theology is deeply indebted to the Christian tradition. While there are moments that signal important departures from the tradition of Christian spirituality, the richness of classic Christian spirituality is preserved by Gutierrez. For Gustavo Gutierrez, the following of Jesus is at the heart of Christian spirituality, wherein meditation and prayer with the Scriptures play a central role (WDOW 1-3). The central significance of the bible in the thought of Gutierrez should provide a hint about the place of spirituality in his theology. After all, much of the tradition of Christian spirituality and mysticism was, before anything else, a form of contemplative and meditative biblical exegesis (*lectio divina*).² Gutierrez insists that terms such as 'spirituality' and 'mysticism' must be refined by a more careful and comprehensive examination of the terms in the Christian tradition. "It is important, therefore, to go back to the biblical sources as well as to the authors of the great spiritualities, and to refine our understandings of certain ideas" (WDOW 54). While Gutierrez provides us with a fruitful understanding of spirituality, he is less clear about the meaning of mysticism. The closest he comes to offering us a suggestion of its meaning is in the following quote: "While I do not offer this as a general definition of what we mean by mysticism, it is clear that it has something to do with an experience of God in a key of love, peace, and joy" (MIC 81). Of course, it would be misguided to

²For a classic work which demonstrates the importance of biblical exegesis in the Middle Ages see Beryl Smalley The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964).

argue that since a definition of mysticism is lacking in the theology of Gutierrez it follows that mysticism is absent from his thought. The task of this dissertation as a whole is to demonstrate the significance of mysticism in contemporary thought, including in the liberation theology of Gutierrez, on the one hand, and to contribute to refining and elaborating on the meaning of mysticism, on the other. By studying both the traditional and novel elements of spirituality and mysticism in the thought of Gutierrez we will be in a position to better judge the appropriation of these terms by Gutierrez. This chapter will show that spiritual and mystical elements play a crucial role in the thought of Gutierrez even when the term mystical, in particular, is rather undeveloped in his thought.

Traditional Elements of Spirituality in Gutierrez

Challenging the Split between Theology and Spirituality³

Gutierrez notes that in the early Church, theology was seen as a form of wisdom that had spiritual training and the following of Christ at the core of its being. "As a matter of fact, in the early centuries every theology took the form of what we today call a 'spiritual theology' --that is, it was a reflection carried on in function of the following of the Lord, the 'imitation of Christ' ...But toward the fourteenth century a divorce began to take place between theology and spirituality that was to be harmful to both" (WDOW

³Related to this split between theology and spirituality, Gutierrez claims, is the split between the natural and supernatural realms. Gutierrez follows much of Catholic theology on this issue, e.g., Maurice Blondel and Karl Rahner, in insisting that there is nothing that is purely natural or devoid of grace. Again, it is the fault of some forms of late medieval scholasticism and, even more the modern world, for separating the natural and supernatural realms from each other. Gutierrez wants to affirm, rather, that all of human nature and creation is imbued with the spirit of grace (TL 69-70). Every act of knowing, thus, involves an 'infinite openness' of the human spirit to God. This suggests that the intellectual realm of life is shot through with grace and, thus, the simple act of human knowing is implicitly a spiritual act.

36). The harm that ensues for both theology and spirituality concerns the mutual estrangement between thoughtful, attentive reflection, on the one hand, and participatory and loving praxis, on the other. In the fourteenth century, theological scholasticism centered in the universities increasingly became separated from the monastic context of traditional spiritual theology. In his work *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutierrez laments the fact and consequences of this split, even if the move of theology beyond the walls of the monastery is to be encouraged, and insists that "the spiritual function of theology....constitutes a permanent dimension of theology" (TL 5).

What exactly is spiritual theology for Gutierrez? While only implicit in his thought, it could be said that spiritual theology for Gutierrez is guided by a transformational rather than an informational model of theology. The central task of the theological enterprise is to inspire and provoke a new way of thinking, acting, and believing. Spiritual theology is form of reflection which seeks to inform, transform, and conform our lives to the example of Christ.⁴ Spirituality is an all-embracing style of life which "gives a profound unity to our prayer, thought, and action" (WDOW 88). Even questions regarding method in theology, Gutierrez argues, should not be divorced from spirituality. In fact, he says, the Greek word for method comes from *hodos*, 'way'. It was by their particular lifestyle and manner of life that the early Christian community distinguished themselves from the surrounding world. Thus, the early Christians were known as followers of the 'way' (WDOW 80-81). For Gutierrez, then, spiritual theology

⁴Bernard of Clairvaux's teaching on the Redemption suggests that what is deformed (human nature after the Fall) must be reformed by conforming to the Form of God. See Bernard McGinn, The Growth of Mvsticism (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994) 174-76.

has its origins in the Scriptural mandate to imitate the life of Christ. Theological reflection is impoverished when theory is isolated from this Christian praxis. "Reflection on the mystery of God (for that is what a theology is) is possible only in the context of the following of Jesus (WDOW 136; TSMYF 5).

Gutierrez understands spirituality as a conversion to a new way of life. An encounter with God's presence shocks and grips the recipient and brings about unforeseen and novel possibilities. The old mode-of-being-in-the-world is abandoned for a new manner of interpreting, experiencing, and acting. While Gutierrez regards the ethical commitment to justice and compassion to be at the heart of this new way of life, it would be a mistake simply to reduce his reflections on spirituality to an issue of ethics. Instead, what is also involved is a reconsideration of what we mean by knowledge, truth, or faith. In the thought of Gutierrez, knowledge is not simply a detached, cognitive representation of reality by an idea or concept. Neutral intellectual objectivity may indeed block knowledge from emerging in our lives. In the bible, Gutierrez avers, knowledge "is a very rich concept that is not limited to the intellectual realm but also connotes taste, fellow feeling, and love. Knowledge here is a direct and profound kind of knowledge that embraces all dimensions of the person who is known and loved" (GL xiv). With the prophets, for instance, truth is more of an event or happening which is disclosed in the life and struggles of the prophet and Israel as a whole (PPH 60). Thus, Gutierrez wants to convey the point that we come to the knowledge of truth only by a process of participation, engagement, and involvement. Truth comes by way of manifestation and

gift.⁵

This vision of truth shapes Gutierrez's understanding of faith as well. Far from being a detached intellectual assent to certain propositions and doctrines, faith is, rather, an attitude of commitment (PPH 20).⁶ Faith is not merely an affirmation that God exists or an affirmation of particular ecclesial dogmas; instead, faith is the "vital acceptance of the gift of the word, heard in the community of the church as encounter with the Lord and love for one's fellow human beings. Faith pervades Christian existence in its entirety" (PPH 55; TSMYF 6). Gutierrez also describes the commitment of faith as a kind of ecstatic love (PPH 20, 59). It is ecstatic in that faith demands a movement outside of oneself into an-other, whether that other be God or one's neighbor. Faith is a knowledge born of love. Gutierrez's employment of the term *orthopraxis* should be seen in light of this interpretation of faith. The goal, Gutierrez says, "is to balance and even to reject the primacy and almost exclusiveness which doctrine has enjoyed in Christian life and above all to modify the emphasis, often obsessive, upon the attainment of an orthodoxy....In a more positive vein, the intention is to recognize the work and importance of concrete behavior, of deeds, and action, of praxis in the Christian life" (TL 10). Gutierrez interprets the famous definition of faith by Anselm along these lines.

In his *Proslogion* Anselm prays: "I have no wish, my Lord, to plunge into your

⁵See David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987) for a development of the hermeneutical understanding of truth as manifestation (especially pp.28-29).

⁶In addition to this understanding of faith being close to Simone Weil, I have also mentioned that Ludwig Wittgenstein understands the heart of Christianity to involve such a view of faith. He asks: "How do I know that two people mean the same when each says he believes in God?...A theology which insists on the use of certain particular words and phrases, and outlaws others, does not make anything clearer...Practice gives words their sense" *Culture and Value* trans. Peter Winch. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980) 85e.

depth, for my intelligence could never exhaust it. I desire only to grasp in some measure that truth of yours that my heart already believes and loves. I seek not to understand in order to believe. I believe in order to understand. For I am certain that if I did not believe, I would not understand" (PPH 56). Gutierrez interprets this monastic understanding of faith to mean that theological reflection is sterile without both a spiritual and ethical commitment. Objective and detached talk *about* God is in danger of becoming stagnant and trite if theology is not primarily concerned with talk, even struggle, *to* and *with* God. Prayer reminds us of the irreducible mystery of God and the limits of an intellectual comprehension of the Divine. Gutierrez concludes his reading of Anselm by reiterating that faith means "feeling, acting, and thinking" as Christ (PPH 56).⁷

The necessity of the example of Christ allows Gutierrez to insist that the Christian way of life (Christian orthopraxis) is not simply any form of action, however. Indeed, action in itself is ambiguous. There must be some norms or standards by which to judge human action. In this sense, Gutierrez certainly does not shun the need for theory or doctrinal standards. The revelation of truth in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ is the norm of praxis in the theology of Gutierrez. "The ultimate criteria come from revealed truth, which we accept in faith and not from praxis itself" (TSMYF 101). This returns us to the importance of Scripture for Gutierrez. As he is fully aware, the tradition of Christian spirituality was "essentially meditation on the Bible, geared toward spiritual

⁷Augustine's Confessions trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Books, 1961) also express beautifully the interchange of forms of predication. Augustine's theological reflections about God are often interrupted to give way to prayer and confession to God (though also 'to and with' the Christian community).

growth" (TL 4). The bible was the sacred text by which all manners of thinking, acting, and believing was evaluated. An imitation of Christ was to be the fruit of all theological reflection. Knowledge of God was, thus, the discovery of truth in humble form of Jesus Christ. This discovery was inaccessible by mere argument; instead, it was an encounter "that springs from the everyday sufferings, struggles, and hopes of the people; not an 'orthodoxy' that exhausts itself within itself, but the affirmation of a vital, extremely intimate, and yet conscious and reflective truth" (PPH 143).

Gutierrez also wants to make clear that spirituality in the Christian tradition is a communal affair. Only with the modern world did Christianity begin to take on a more individualistic meaning associated with bourgeois freedoms and rights (TSMYF 110-11). A more accurate understanding of spirituality, Gutierrez claims, is to see it as a communal journey of an entire people. In this way, Gutierrez relates the communal way of life to Israel's journey from oppression to freedom narrated in the book of *Exodus*. "The Bible in fact depicts it (the spiritual journey of Exodus) as a collective venture: under the prior action of the God who liberates, a people breaks out of exploitation and death, crosses the desert, and reaches the promised land. Or, if you will, it is the venture of a 'messianic people' itself called *the way*....These biblical paradigms have inspired Christian experience and reflection on this theme down through the history of spirituality" (WDOW 3-4, my addition). Gutierrez is certainly right to insist on this collective dimension of Christian spirituality. In spite of much popular, 'new age' understandings of spirituality today, spirituality and mysticism were phenomena deeply imbedded in the religious beliefs, practices, and communities of the Christian tradition. Bernard McGinn's

understanding of mysticism as a part or element of a concrete religion ratifies this interpretation of Gutierrez.⁸ Spirituality is, for Gutierrez, a communal journey located within particular historical and religious communities and traditions.

The Moment of Silence in Theology

Gutierrez contends that the split between theology and spirituality is related to a lack of modesty in modern theological reflection. The failure to incorporate a moment of silence marks much modern God-talk. This failure has resulted in a idolatrous neglect of the limits of language in the face of Divine mystery. The moment of silence in the face of Divine incomprehensibility is thus a crucial element in the theological method of Gutierrez. Central to his entire work has been the insistence that talk about God is only possible within the prior horizon of contemplating and doing God's will. Contemplation and ethical-political commitment are conditions for the possibility of theology. He has frequently referred to these moments as the first and second act of theology.⁹ "Contemplation and commitment combine to form what may be called the phase of *silence* before God. Theological discourse, on the other hand, is a *speaking* about God.

⁸"No mystics (at least before the present century) believed in or practiced 'mysticism'. They believed in or practiced Christianity (or Judaism, or Islam, or Hinduism), that is, religions that contained mystical elements as parts of a wider historical whole." See Bernard McGinn, The Foundations of Mysticism (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991) xvi.

⁹It is important to make clear what these helpful models of 'first and second act' do not mean. We would be mistaken to simply assume that the first act is devoid of an intellectual element, while the second act is purely an intellectual act. The first act of spiritual, contemplative praxis and ethical-political praxis do indeed embody and express intellectual reflection. There is no strict separation between the first and second act. With the second act, the point is, theological reflection takes a more systematic and reflective form. In the second act, questions of coherency, consistency, and rationality are important norms that are to check naive or careless positions. Nevertheless, there is already present reflection on truth, justice, and God in the first act of theology.

Silence is a condition for any loving encounter with God in prayer and commitment. Experience of the inadequacy of words to express what we live out in our depths will make our speech both more fruitful and more unpretentious. Theology is talk that is constantly enriched by silence" (TSMYF 3; OJ xiii).¹⁰ Reflection on the mystery of God, therefore, can only take place following spiritual and ethical-political praxis.

Gutierrez associates mysticism and prophecy with this moment of silence in the face of Divine ineffability. Both of these forms of religious belief and practice suggest that God cannot be approached apart from a way of life that seeks to heighten our consciousness of God in history and nature. Mystical and prophetic language indicate the insufficiency of detached, scientific talk about God. Mysticism and prophecy are concerned with fostering an attention to where God is revealed. "The mystery that is God reveals itself in contemplation and in solidarity with the poor" (TSMYF 56). Prophetic language makes evident the barren character of God-talk that fails to inspire solidarity with the neighbor. Love of neighbor is not merely an ethical demand, however; rather, the love that is expressed in compassion for the poor and oppressed, Gutierrez argues, is the path to a knowledge of the truth and goodness of God. Mystical language serves to foster an awareness of the manifest presence of God in our lives, and yet it does so without relinquishing the un-manifest mystery of God.¹¹ Contemplation provides an

¹⁰Augustine remarks that while God is strictly ineffable, God wishes us to speak in order to praise him. "For God, although nothing worthy may be spoken of Him, has accepted the tribute of the human voice and wished us to take joy in praising Him with our words" On Christian Doctrine trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr., (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1958) 11.

¹¹The dialectical mystical theology of John Scotus Eriugena insists that creation is a theophany, but a theophany which still hides the essence of God. All of reality is an "apparition of what is non-apparent, the manifestation of the hidden, the affirmation of the negated, the comprehension of the incomprehensible..." Thus

avenue for contact with God and for a greater comprehension of the God who is immanent in the world and within the core of our being. The greater the comprehension, however, the more we are struck by the overwhelming incomprehensibility of God. In this light (or darkness), Gutierrez perspicaciously interprets the meaning and necessity of silence and contemplation in theological reflection.

In interpreting the historical roots of the term contemplation (*theoria*), Gutierrez mentions the original, Platonic connotation. "Plotinus, for example, would place the emphasis on theory insofar as this means union with God to the disparagement of political praxis. This position in turn would influence theology, where theory would be thought of as contemplation and union with God, and practice would be seen primarily as work for the neighbor, or the active life" (TSMYF 91-92). While, it is clear that Gutierrez does not wish to contribute to this disparagement of political and ethical praxis, he also does not want to deprecate the importance of contemplation and spirituality. For *theoria*, in the contemplative sense, has vision of and union with God as its final end. In the thought of the Christian Platonists, and Gutierrez, at the heart of this contemplation and prayer lies the love of God. Contemplation is a participatory and loving form of knowledge. Knowledge about God is only possible through a life which embodies and incarnates love and beauty. Contemplation plays a crucial role for Gutierrez in fostering and inspiring a life that is fully aware of the gratuitous love of God (WDOW 110-11). In this sense, theory as a form of spirituality is indispensable for theology.

the tension between the *proodos* of God as going forth into all things, on the one hand, and the *epistrophe* of God returning and negating all things, on the other, reminds us of God's immanence and God's transcendent Nothingness. See Bernard McGinn, The Growth of Mysticism (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994) 99.

The Mystery of God

As we have seen, the theological form of knowledge which Gutierrez advances is non-objective. Silent and contemplative praxis may make knowledge of God possible in a way that neutral and objective speech about God fails. The major reason for this is simple: God is no object of human knowledge. "It is important to be clear on this point at the very beginning of any discourse on the faith, for God is truly more an object of hope (which respects mystery) than of knowledge" (TSMYF 55). Gutierrez often mentions the following quote of Aquinas in this regard: "We know more of what God is not than of what God is" (TSMYF 55).¹² The fact that we cannot know the essence of God implies for Gutierrez the limitations of rational language. Faith, hope, and love are Christian forms of experience and practice that give birth to a knowledge of 'things unseen' (St. Paul).

The sense of Divine incomprehensibility is a central feature of Gutierrez's work and warns us of limitations of ideas, images, metaphors, etc. in speaking of God. In the view of Gutierrez, when such ideas or symbols are employed they point not only to the object to which they refer, but to their own insufficiency. Symbols belong to the realm of silence, as does the experience of human love. "As the experience of human love shows us, in this kind of encounter we enter depths incapable of communicating what is

¹²See *The Summa Theologica*, Bk.1, Q.3, trans. Anton C. Pegis, *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Random House, 1945) 28. Aquinas also says that the human mind can only know that God is not what God is (ibid 94-95). Aquinas does suggest that God may be able to be known by the intellect and, thus, it is the use of the intellect that is the highest beatitude for humanity (ibid 71). However, it is only possible to see God by the graced intellect not by the natural intellect (ibid 77). And this vision of the intellect is dependent upon the presence of charity. "Hence the intellect which has more of the light of glory will see God the more perfectly. But he will have a fuller participation of the light of glory who has more charity, because where there is the greater charity, there is more desire, and desire in a certain manner makes the one desiring apt and prepared to receive the object desired" (ibid 82).

experienced at the affective level, then we are fully engaged in loving. And when words are incapable of showing forth our experience, we fall back on symbols, which are another way of remaining silent. For when we use a symbol, we do not speak; we let an object or gesture speak for us. This is precisely how we proceed in the liturgy; symbolic language is the language of a love that transcends words" (OJ xiv). The affirmation and denial of language and symbols are thus held in a dialectical tension.¹³

In Gutierrez's reading of the book of Job, Job's struggle with God makes possible his awareness of Divine incomprehensibility. The God that is manifested to Job cannot be grasped and anticipated by rational categories. Divine mystery interrupts all human attempts to fully comprehend God, whether in the form of explanations for suffering by Job's friends, or by Job's temptations to repudiate God altogether. On the one hand, Job's friends profane the mystery of God by reducing God's actions in history and nature to rational norms of reward-punishment. All of human life is interpreted vis-a-vis this punitive understanding of suffering. In this framework, good works are performed in expectation of reward. Gutierrez contends that this version of self-seeking religion

¹³Gutierrez does not mention the work of Pseudo-Dionysius, but I believe that this classic mystical theologian deserves mention here. To recall his work, cataphatic language (affirmative speech) is held in dialectical tension with apophatic language (negative speech). The use of cataphatic language about God corresponds to the manifestation or descent of God in creation (*proodos*). In this Divine act, there is a movement from the One into the multiplicity and diversity of creation. The multiplication and profusion of metaphors, symbols, liturgical practices, etc. correspond to the act of creation. On the other hand, the diversity of such metaphors, including ideas, point to their own insufficiency. The use of dissimilar metaphors in Pseudo-Dionysius (e.g., God is a drunken sailor) are even more appropriate than more similar metaphors because with the former it is less a danger to understand these metaphors in a literal fashion, while with the latter (e.g., God is Being) the belief that we have captured God by our language is hard to avoid. "Since the way of negation appears to be more suitable to the realm of the divine and since positive affirmations are always unfitting to the hiddenness of the inexpressible, a manifestation through dissimilar shapes is more correctly to be applied to the invisible." See his *The Celestial Hierarchy*, Chapter 2, 141A-B, in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* trans. Colm Luibheid, (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 150. The apophatic moment of language corresponds to the *epistrophe* or the return from multiplicity back into the One.

constructs an idol in lieu of the true God (OJ 5). In relation to the affliction of Job, moreover, this framework is utterly cruel to him. Job's friends are incapable of listening to him attentively and silently. Their coarse words desecrate a wisdom demanding silence. "Will no one teach you to be quiet--the only wisdom that becomes you. Kindly listen to my accusation and give your attention to the way I shall plead" (*Job* 13:5-6). Their inability to be silent impedes their ability to empathize with the suffering of others. It also, however, impedes them from coming to know the mystery of God. As much as Job's friends claim to be defending and representing God, they in fact are doing so dishonestly. "Do you mean to defend God," Job asks, "by prevarication and by dishonest argument?" (*Job* 13:7). The 'divine consolations' which Job's friends communicate are no more than false consolations or opiates which these sorry comforters offer in defense of God. For Gutierrez, this text reveals the idolatry of any form of theism which fails to keep silent when appropriate. In order to preserve both the mystery of God, on the one hand, and to express our solidarity with the afflicted, on the other, a silent contemplation and praxis is indispensable. Job's friends fail to recognize this. "The self-sufficient talk of these men," Gutierrez remarks, "is the real blasphemy: their words veil and disfigure the face of a God who loves freely and gratuitously" (OJ 29).

The opposite idolatry, Gutierrez mentions, is the simple and outright repudiation of God. No doubt, Job is tempted by this option. The idolatry of some forms of theism (Job's friends) is thus not the only mistake which the book of *Job* calls to mind. Another desecration of the mystery of God is a confident repudiation of God. Job's encounter with God makes possible a reconciliation with God and, consequently, a renewed hope.

The anger, bitterness, and despair that Job naturally feels is prevented from dominating the rest of his life. He arrives at a knowledge of God, through pain and suffering to be sure, which ends his resignation and leads to a new life. Gutierrez wishes to suggest here that a bold repudiation of God, as in modern atheism, is as idolatrous as the explanatory words of Job's friends. Ultimately, such a rejection of God may lapse into a replacement of God by the human person. God is domesticated and fabricated as an idol in this act. "Yet, in simple truth, the logic at work in a knowledge that claims to know everything about the Lord (even in a negative manner)...leads in the final analysis to the replacement of God with self and to the usurpation of God's place. It leads, in other words, to the denial of God" (OJ 79, my addition).

The knowledge born of Job's suffering conveys to him a significant point, a point that will be important to the understanding of mysticism in the thought of Gutierrez: consciousness of the finitude and littleness of human nature. Human life is fleeting and human nature is like a shadow, as the prayer of Psalm 39 has it: "Lord, let me know my end, and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting life is...Surely everyone stands as a mere breath. Surely everyone goes about like a shadow." The suffering of Job teaches him humility, but not, notice, a recognition of his sinfulness. Job never comes to believe that he has been deserving of his suffering (as punishment for sin). "He acknowledges his littleness but does not admit he has sinned; he expresses humility but not resignation. Job feels himself to be little (literally: trivial, of little weight)--that is, unimportant, of little value....The speeches of God have brought home the fact that human beings are not the center of the universe and that not everything has

been made for their service. Acknowledgement of his littleness may thus be an important step toward the abandonment of his anthropocentrism" (OJ 76). This recognition of Job's littleness, that humanity is not at the center of the universe, is an important step in the face-to-face vision of God.

Love and Mysticism

The significance of love in the Christian mystical tradition can scarcely be overestimated. The confession from Scripture that 'God is love' will provide the entire Christian tradition with the decisive clue into who God is (1John 4:7-ff). The importance of love certainly holds for Christian mystics, even those mystics we have traditionally come to see as 'intellectual mystics'.¹⁴ For Christian mystics, love brings an awareness and consciousness of God, the self, and the cosmos that is unobtainable by pure discursive rationality. Of course, that does not mean that love in Christian mysticism is simply an emotional, romantic, anti-intellectual experience. Instead, Christian mystics often maintain that love itself is a form of knowing.¹⁵ Gustavo Gutierrez shares this understanding of mysticism, even if it is not explicitly noted by Gutierrez himself. That

¹⁴Bernard McGinn argues that the contrast between intellectual and affective mysticism may be misleading and too general. McGinn insists that even when there are differences concerning the nature of love and knowledge in the path to mystical union with God, the fact remains that for Christian mysticism both love and knowledge play a pivotal role. The significance of this fact should warn us of reading mysticism as either purely emotional and anti-intellectual, on the one hand, and simply intellectual, on the other. See his essay, "Love, Knowledge, and Unio Mystica in the Western Christian Tradition," in Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam ed. Moshe Idel and Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1996) 59-86.

¹⁵McGinn cites the influential expression of Gregory the Great, 'amor ipse notitia est' (ibid 63, 81). The theologian Bernard Lonergan understands faith as a 'knowledge born of love.' He interprets the experience of conversion in relation to the dynamic state of 'being in love.' See Method in Theology (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971) 115.

love of God leads to knowledge of God is a central theme of his theology (PPH 8; TL 198, 194). We have already seen how the conception of contemplation in his work is deeply aligned with a non-objective and participatory form of knowledge born of love.

To place love at the heart of mysticism makes apparent the problem of reducing mysticism to extraordinary states, visions, locutions, powers, etc.. In this way, love is a norm by which to judge the authenticity of mysticism. In reading the letters of St. Paul, Gutierrez notes the importance of Paul's claim that while all spiritual gifts will pass away, love alone will remain (WDOW 62; 1Cor.13). Greater than the power of tongues, the working of miracles, and prophesying stands the presence of love. "The power of the Spirit," Gutierrez states, "leads to love of God and others and not to the working of miracles" (WDOW 63). It is through this love, he continues, that we are united to God and become one with God (WDOW 63).

Of course, the fact that love is a dominant presence in the thought of Gutierrez does not prove that mysticism is necessarily an important element in his thought. To speak of mysticism proper there needs to be a more explicit articulation of the immediate or direct presence of God.¹⁶ Bernard McGinn has shown the plurality and diversity of Christian understandings of the nature of mysticism. Such models include "contemplation or vision of God, rapture or ecstasy, deification, living in Christ, the birth of the Word in the soul, radical obedience to the will of God, and especially union with God."¹⁷ In spite of such diversity, all these models of mysticism attempt to express, in finite human

¹⁶ibid 59.

¹⁷ibid.

language, the direct or immediate presence of God. Gustavo Gutierrez has not dwelt at length on the history of Christian mysticism. The presence of mystical themes, nevertheless, plays an important role in his thought. In Gutierrez's reading of Job, for example, an expression of an immediate, face-to-face encounter with God comes to the forefront and lends credibility to the attribution of a mystical element to the thought of Gustavo Gutierrez.

His reference to the encounter of Job with God is especially germane in this regard. "I once knew you by hearsay, now my eyes have seen you..." (*Job* 42:5). Job speaks of an immediate and direct presence of God in his life, a presence that had been lacking hitherto. This experience of God in his life instigates a transformation in his understanding of himself, God, and the cosmos. From a mood of dejection, bitterness, and despair he learns to trust anew in the God he had previously known only by hearsay. He learns to appreciate and cherish the wonder and beauty of the cosmos. He learns that, while there is chaos and disorder in the world, it is not all chaos (OJ 80). Most of all, Gutierrez maintains, Job learns that God is his redeemer and that God is love.

Job now perceives that there is another way of knowing and speaking about God. His previous contact with God had been indirect, 'by hearsay' through others (his friends, for example!); now it is direct, unmediated. Job is now beginning to savor the Pauline 'face-to-face' encounter with God in which faith, hope, and love abide, 'but the greatest of these is love' (ICor 13:13)....Job therefore surrenders to God and can say with Jeremiah in time of crisis: 'The Lord is with me' (Jer 20:11), and with the psalmist: 'I shall behold thy face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with beholding thy form' (Ps 17:15). He can repeat here, after this meeting with God, what he had earlier said in hope: 'My heart is bursting within my breast' (Job 19:27)....Job has previously addressed God on various occasions in protest; now he does so in acceptance and a submission that is inspired not by resignation but by contemplative love (OJ 85).

Job's encounter with God expresses a mystical consciousness that pronounces a different

way of 'knowing and speaking about God'. Objective language about God, language of hearsay, is replaced by a knowledge that is born of contemplative love. The vision of God by Job brings a knowledge that causes his heart to burst within him, a knowledge that eschews rational explanations whether in the form of the arguments of Job's friends or as the outright repudiation of God as the cause of evil.

For Gutierrez, the presence of grace is what consumes the life of Job and is at the heart of mysticism. The language of mysticism is animated by pure grace and love. Mystical language heightens our consciousness of the mystery and gratuitousness of God, contends Gutierrez. It reminds us of the limits not only of the human mind, but also of human works. While the building of the kingdom of God demands the pursuit of justice, for example, ultimately the kingdom of God is pure gift. "Entrance into the kingdom of God is not a right to be won, not even by the practice of justice; it is always a freely given gift" (OJ 89). This recognition of the freedom and gratuitousness of God enables us, Gutierrez avers, to avoid the idolatry of reducing God to human ideas, categories, works, etc.. Contemplation disposes us to recognize that everything is gift (WDOW 111). The nature of love is the decisive clue in the regard. Why? Because "true love is always a gift, something that transcends motives and merits" (WDOW 110). When we love, we give without a why, without counting the costs, and without seeking reward (unlike Job's friends). Love silences all motives and (without words) contemplates God both in the form of prayer and in the form of our neighbor.

Novel Elements of Spirituality in Gutierrez

While we are going to consider the following elements under the designation of novel elements of spirituality and mysticism, it would be wise to begin by mentioning that in some ways the following elements are, in fact, quite traditional. First, while the insistence on the accessibility of mysticism to whole groups of marginalized, uneducated, and poor peoples is a novel element of liberation spirituality, it is not without its forerunners. In chapter two we have seen how trends in late medieval spirituality were inviting the participation of the lay people, women, and the uneducated. Along these lines, Jean Gerson exclaimed that even young girls and simple people (*idiotae*) can become mystical theologians.¹⁸ Second, the claim that liberation spirituality and mysticism locates the most profound contact with God in the face of the neighbor is certainly not without precedent. Indeed, this may be obvious since *agape* is crucial to the entire Christian tradition. The early Christian fathers, for example, were unanimous in their refusal to disparage the importance of *praxis* for the Christian life, even if they conceded with many of the Greek philosophers and especially neo-Platonists, the superiority of *theoria* over *praxis*. This disagreement with pagan thinkers is a crucial element for the later mystical tradition. Concerning the early Christian fathers Bernard McGinn remarks: "Where they do not agree with late pagan philosophers is in their refusal to reject *praxis*, because they had come to understand it not as politics but as the

¹⁸See references to Jean Gerson, *De mystica theologia speculativa*, in Steven Ozment, The Age of Reform: 1250-1550 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) 74. Also see Ozment's discussion of the late medieval lay movements such as the 'Modern Devotion' and the Beguines (91-98).

practice of the Christian love for the neighbor (*agape*) enjoined by Jesus..."¹⁹ As we will see, the novel element of liberation spirituality insists that *agape* has political implications as well.

Another issue at stake concerns the necessarily public character of the Christian message in opposition to the private, esoteric teachings of gnosticism. Christian mysticism runs the risk of becoming gnostic rather than mystical when it, first, is no longer accessible to the masses, and, second, when it fails to locate Divine Otherness in the otherness of the neighbor. In late medieval mysticism, Eckhart expresses cogently the fact that mysticism should be accessible to every human person, on the one hand, and that mysticism is not to be closed within an interior/private realm, on the other. One can come into contact with God in public spheres (i.e., in a stable or by the fireside) as much as inside oneself.²⁰ Finally, the centrality of the issue of suffering and affliction in the thought of liberation theology is not a novel element *per se*. The 'dark night' of John of the Cross, for instance, articulates an experience of affliction and abandonment by God in a way that is congenial to liberation spirituality and mysticism. In this light, contemplation includes moments of anguish, pain, and agony. In Gutierrez's reading, however, this aspect of John's mysticism will be pushed further to include the agony of oppression, widespread poverty, racism, and exploitation. Struggle and combat will become as necessary to mysticism as are moments of stillness and silence. Now that we

¹⁹Bernard McGinn, The Foundations of Mysticism (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991) 106.

²⁰"Because truly, when people think that they are acquiring more of God in inwardness, in devotion, in sweetness and in various approaches than they do by the fireside or in the stable, you are acting just as if you took God and muffled his head up in a cloak and pushed him under a bench" Sermon 5b, Meister Eckhart trans. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1981) 183.

have briefly mentioned some of the traditional elements implicit in the liberation spirituality and mysticism, we can turn to consider the novel elements.

History and the Eruption of the Poor

The rise of historical consciousness in the modern, western world has dramatic implications for all of philosophy and theology, but also for the study of mysticism. Even though mysticism attempts to express the timeless mystery of God, it unavoidably does so through the historical, socio-cultural, and linguistic paradigms of any age and place. Mysticism, no less than religion as a whole, is finitely situated in time and space.²¹ Gutierrez explains that such a fact accounts for the tremendous diversity of Christian spiritualities. "The reason for this diversity is that the nucleus around which a spiritual way is built is not exactly the same in every case....The starting point in each instance bears the mark of the historical context in which the experience of encounter with the Lord took place" (WDOW 88-89, 26-27). The mark of an authentic spirituality and mysticism is, consequently, a hermeneutical creativity animated by a rereading of the treasures of the past in light of present questions and struggles (WDOW 31). This creativity seeks to bring into dialogue the resources of the past with the contemporary situation and world-view. In the thought of Gutierrez, the reappropriation of past spiritual traditions (warranted by both the tradition itself and our contemporary, historical situation)

²¹Concerning the importance of social and historical context for the study of mysticism, Bernard McGinn says the following: "The paradoxical intersection of the timeless and time implied in the mystery of the Incarnation is nowhere more evident than in the ways in which 'timeless' mystical consciousness of God's presence has been conditioned by changes and developments in the church and in society at large" The Foundations of Mysticism, op.cit., xv.

is joined with an engagement in the issues and experiences of poor and oppressed groups in the context of the third world.

The large scale of injustice, poverty, exploitation, and pre-mature death experienced by many in 'third world' countries forces us to consider the significance of spirituality, and religion in general, in the face of such events. In what manner, if at all, does spirituality and mysticism contribute to enriching human life in such a context? Is spirituality a credible expression of Christian life if it fails to confront the nocturnal face of history? Gutierrez maintains that spirituality must be willing to reflect on these questions of suffering and injustice if it professes to be following in the footsteps of Christ crucified. What is new to a liberation spirituality is not exactly the presence of suffering, however. More accurately, it is a consciousness of the roots of human caused suffering. "Our increasingly clear awareness of the harsh situation in Latin America and the sufferings of the poor must not make us overlook the fact that the harshness and suffering are not what is truly new in the present age....What is new is that the people are beginning to grasp the causes of their situation of injustice and are seeking to release themselves from it" (WDOW 20). Gutierrez argues that while this consciousness fully emerged in the modern world, it was already present, in inchoate form, in a figure like Ignatius of Loyola. "It seems to me, however, that it (Ignatian spirituality) represents an important contribution to Christian spirituality, and this at the threshold of the modern age, at a time when the human race was acquiring a new grasp of its own historical reality and of the possibility of changing this reality" (WDOW 108, my addition). The grasp of the roots and causes of injustice is to advance the possibility of historical change.

For historical change to be likely, freedom and a critical awareness must pervade the consciousness of the marginalized groups.

The contemporary situation in which spirituality finds itself, Gutierrez continues, includes the emergence of global issues and struggles. More than class analysis is needed. In his work *Sobre el Trabajo Humano* Gutierrez explains: "No solo la perspectiva de la clase social, hoy la cuestion de la injusticia ha saltado las fronteras nacionales y exige tener en cuenta tambien la dimension mundial de la injusticia. En ella intervienen las relaciones entre paises ricos y paises pobres, asi como la accion de las empresas multinacionales en la economia internacional" (STH 17). We are faced with issues and questions that extend beyond our borders and include political and economic systems, colonial policies, the distribution of wealth and power in parts of the world, etc.. Gutierrez demonstrates that many of these issues have become a part of the social teachings of the Catholic church. In particular, the encyclicals *Laborem Exercens* and *Populorum Progressio* differ from past social encyclicals, he maintains, in that they reflect on non-European historical issues and problems (STH 19). Within these two encyclicals, conflict is divulged to exist not merely between countries and nations, but also between entire parts of the world, that is, between the wealth of the first world and the poverty of the third world.²²

In light of the above historical issues, there is an escalating awareness of the poor

²²Concerning such conflict, Gutierrez quotes Pope John Paul 2 in *Redemptor Hominis*: "Es bien conocido el cuadro de la civilizacion consumistica, que consiste en un cierto exceso de bienes necesarios al hombre, a las sociedades enteras mientras las demas, al menos amplios estratos de las mismas, sufren el hambre, y muchas personas mueren a diario por inedia y desnutricion" (STH 18). The conflict between rich and poor societies is brought to surface here.

and marginalized as entire groups dispersed throughout the globe. This awareness seeks to counter the absence of representation on behalf of the powerless and afflicted. The fact that such voices are now declared to have been absent voices in modernity signals the importance of their eruptive presence. With liberation theology there emerges a concerted effort to incorporate the suffering and struggles of these subjugated groups into its theological reflections. Modernity is faulted for having obscured from view, and even subjugated, the voices of the poor and oppressed. Retrieval of their insights and traditions is at the heart of liberation theology.

More specifically related to spirituality, however, Gutierrez argues that liberation spirituality challenges the monopoly of spirituality by the educated and clerical. While he fails to mention the historical roots of trends and movements opposing such a clerical spirituality, he offers trenchant remarks on the implications of a more democratic spirituality. Central to this transformation of spirituality is an openness to the spiritual experiences of the dispossessed and uneducated (WDOW 14). Those who live on the margins of the privileged political, economic, and cultural worlds are invited to participate and contribute to our understanding of Christian spirituality. Insofar as spirituality is a following of Jesus, in the view of Gutierrez, the gospel is clear in its invitation of discipleship to all, including the poor, the sick, the blind and lame, the oppressed, sinners, etc.. In the vision of St. Paul, Jesus invites those foolish in the eyes of the world and those of low birth (1Cor 1:26). Thus, Gutierrez contends that this openness must accompany any spirituality and mysticism which operates under the name Christian.

Solidarity with the poor and oppressed is a crucial moment of Gutierrez's

understanding of spirituality. Without attention to these powerless voices and persons, conversion to God is hindered. For at the heart of the ethical relationship with the poor is a turning of one's soul from oneself to an other. Sin is precisely that reality which fails to attend to God in others. "When we accept the divine message, we are converted to the Other in others. It is with them that we live out the message. Faith cannot be live in pure privacy with the self; it is the negation of every turning in upon the self" (TSMYF 13). In the view of Augustine, conversion is the graced transformation of the will curved upon itself. This conversion is, for Gutierrez, the starting point of any spiritual journey (WDOW 95).

The recognition of political, economic, and military causes of suffering and oppression has brought about, concomitantly, a greater consideration of sin at the level of structural and material realities (WDOW 99). In this form, sin is those actions, structures, and policies which lead to the degradation of human life. Poverty and material lack can be, then, sinful realities which spirituality has the task of challenging. A spirituality which neglects the material dimension of human reality for a purely 'spiritual' reality not only neglects the concrete struggles of the poor and hungry, but also is dangerously close to a dualistic kind of gnosticism. Such gnosticism establishes a strong opposition between the life of the spirit and that of the body, while elevating the former and denigrating the latter. Through his reading of Paul's letters, Gutierrez maintains that such a strict dualism between body and soul is absent in the Christian bible. A life 'walking according to the Spirit' is a life that enhances life against the forces of death and destruction (WDOW 55). When Paul employs a term such as 'flesh', Gutierrez argues,

he is using a metaphor to describe an entire way of life in opposition to the Spirit of God. Thus, a life according to the flesh does not simply translate into a base interpretation of the body and material realities. Works of the flesh include 'spiritual' realities such as immorality, idolatry, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, etc.. (WDOW 59; Gal 5:19-21). In short, for Gutierrez, spirituality is a way of life which confronts and opposes all the forces which destroy life. For this reason, spirituality must be involved with the realms of life usually consigned to the secular and profane, including the realm of politics (PPH 52). In a Christian perspective, spirituality becomes heretical when the material needs of bread, water, medicine, housing, etc. are completely ignored.

The Interruption of Spirituality by Suffering

At the heart of Gutierrez's spiritual theology lies the troubling question: "How can we thank God for the gift of life when the reality around us is one of premature and unjustly inflicted death?...,How can we sing when the suffering of an entire people chokes the sound in our throats?" (WDOW 7). There is no facile answer to this question, Gutierrez responds. Indeed, to offer simplistic answers and explanations to this disturbing query is to run the risk of underestimating the situation of injustice and affliction (WDOW 7). "These facts do not permit an easy optimism or allow us to forget the marginalization, the suffering, the deaths" (WDOW 25). While I will consider at length the reflections of Gutierrez on the question of suffering and evil in chapter six, it is important to note here the implications of these questions for spirituality. Indeed, it is crucial to consider these questions here since Gutierrez so often speaks of a spirituality

of exile and cross (PPH 71). The idea of a spirituality of exile owes much to Gutierrez's reading of the book of *Exodus*. In this text, the experiences and struggles of an entire group of people is expressed in narrative form. We are told of a people enslaved and oppressed at the hands of the Egyptians. Gutierrez interprets their journey from this exploitive situation to a land of freedom and justice as a collective spirituality. This process of liberation is the process by which Israel comes to seek and know God. "The departure from Egypt meant a breaking away from death (for that is what enslavement and need mean) in order to go forth and meet Yahweh and become the people of God" (WDOW 73). Through this journey a loving knowledge of God is made possible.

Gutierrez interprets the 'dark night' of John of the Cross with this story of liberation in mind. He maintains that Exodus and John of the Cross can be read vis-a-vis one another. While Gutierrez does not explicitly note the different facets of John's dark night, he does imply that there are several issues at play. First, the dark night of John of the Cross includes an apophatic element which reads the meaning of faith as darkness to the intellect. Faith is blind and, yet, walks securely without the guidance of images, reason, and phantasms (WDOW 85). Second, in John of the Cross the dark night of the soul also includes a moment of affliction and of spiritual crisis and agony. It is participation in the cross, a frightful night.

Gutierrez highlights the significance of the metaphor of darkness in relation to communal suffering and oppression. In the book of Isaiah, the words of the prophet speak on behalf of God: "I formed you, and set you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring prisoners out from confinement,

and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness" (42:6-7). Commenting on this passage, Gutierrez states that darkness and imprisonment stand in opposition to light and liberation (GL 13). In the Scriptures, he remarks, darkness is a metaphor for that all is opposed to life and creation. "In Genesis, darkness precedes the light; it 'covered the abyss' (1:2) and is a component of chaos...." In the gospel of John, he continues, "the image of darkness is laden with hostility: the darkness is expressly opposed to the acceptance of the word. The reign of death is opposed to the reign of life....Darkness stands for sin, opposition, hostility. Light, on the other hand, is the milieu of love....To follow Jesus means to set free and to give life" (GL 82). According to the Scriptures, then, darkness includes the threat of chaos, suffering, and oppression. In the Christian tradition, Jesus comes to dispel the darkness and bring sight to the blind, proclaim liberty to captives, and to set the oppressed free (Luke 4:18). For Gutierrez, at the heart of spirituality is an imitation of Christ's liberating example. This spirituality is not without pain and dejection, however. The feeling of divine abandonment is often a harsh companion to the experience of the dark night of injustice (WDOW 131). The laments and cries of the poor and oppressed are "echoes, reverberating down through the history of the Christian community, of the cry of Jesus himself: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'" (WDOW 131).

The spiritual struggle of Job is another example of the pain and torment that may accompany a journey in search of God. As with Jacob, Job walks away from the encounter with God with a limp, but it is through this struggle that Job's face-to-face vision of God is made possible (OJ 66). "In all these circumstances there is a new

encounter with oneself and, above all, a new face-to-face encounter with the Lord....John of the Cross speaks of the 'frightful night' through which one must pass, but he also says that the desert is 'the more delightful, savorous, and loving, the deeper, vaster, and more solitary it is'" (WDOW 131). The place of the wilderness is not merely one of suffering, then; it is also the location where God allures us and speaks to us (WDOW 85; Hosea 2:14).

As the prophets so powerfully understood, God speaks to us not apart from, but rather in the midst of conflict and history. "History, concrete history, is the place where God's word comes to us in proportion to our involvement in historical becoming....But this history is a conflictual one, a history of conflicts of interests, of struggles for greater justice, a history of the marginalization and exploitation of human beings, of aspirations for liberation" (PPH 52). It is the willingness of certain persons to attend to God where God is seemingly absent (in suffering and conflict) that justifies us naming them prophets. When such an attention is joined to a solidarity with the poor, the possibility of persecution and death appears. Gutierrez contends that martyrdom is a dominant reality in the spirituality of liberation (WDOW 116-17). With the caveat that martyrdom is not to be sought, Gutierrez defends the meaning of martyrdom as the gift of self laid out on behalf of the dispossessed. In an unadulterated act of martyrdom, participation in the cross of Christ is the consequence of solidarity with the victims of history and society. This radical form of discipleship plays a role in the liberation spirituality of Gutierrez.

Premature Death as a Limit of Spirituality and Mysticism

Extremes forms of affliction and oppression, bodily and spiritual death, is a limit of the mystical life in the thought of Gutierrez. The violence of conquest, exploitive and servile labor, and poverty are obstacles to the cultivation of a mystical consciousness of God. Reflections on these death-dealing obstacles play an important role in the spirituality of Gutierrez. The significance of these issues calls into question the exclusive relegation of spirituality to either a purely sacred or religious realm; a private, interior realm; or a non-material, 'spiritual' realm. The claim that spirituality involves the whole of human life leads Gutierrez to defy the limitation of spirituality to any one of the above realms (WDOW 88). Spirituality will demand attention to the manifestation of the Divine in areas of human life that we consider profane, such as politics; to public locations outside of ourselves, such as the neighbor; to the material and physical corporeality of human nature (WDOW 15; PPH 52). This broad reading of the character of spirituality leads Gutierrez to consider the forces which threaten the Christian life. "Every obstacle that degrades or alienates the work of men and women in building a humane society is an obstacle to the work of salvation" (PPH 32).

The analysis of poverty in the theology of Gutierrez has always been at odds with a romantic reading of the poor. The situation of poverty is not simply interpreted as a situation where humility, simplicity, and worldly detachment thrive. While some of these characteristics of spiritual poverty may be present, this does deter Gutierrez from condemning the situation of material poverty itself. Indeed, he will argue that poverty means death (WDOW 9). "In a word, the existence of poverty represents a sundering

both of solidarity among humanity and also of communion with God" (TL 295). The prophets repudiated poverty, he contends, because to accept poverty and injustice is to fall back into the conditions of servitude which existed prior to the liberation from Egypt (TL 295). The servile conditions of poverty mean more than death of persons and communities, however. The death of entire cultures and traditions may accompany the harsh situation of poverty (WDOW 10). Oppression in all of its forms is a violent adversary of the God of life (GL 3, 8). In a novel and poignant fashion, Gutierrez demonstrates this claim through his reading of the Spanish conquest of the Indies in his book *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*. The Dominican missionary Las Casas was tireless in asserting that the Indians were being "stripped of their lives before their time" and therefore despoiled of "space for their conversion" (LC 4). No doubt, the rapacious plundering of the lands and communities of the Indians was an obstacle to the possibility of conversion. The premature spiritual and bodily deaths of the Indians prevented them from living a complete and dignified life. In addition to the vicious violence of the initial conquest, the servitude and poverty perpetuated by the colonial system extended the violence in new directions. The exploitive and servile work of the *encomienda system* is a major culprit of the oppression of the Indians. In the words of Las Casas, the Indians suffer "servitude, than which, except for death, there is no greater evil" (LC 75).

Las Casas directs a concentrated and sustained attack against the evils of the *encomienda system*. This system was the structural root of the injustices of colonial society. The lives and labors of the Indians were being exploited in the interest of the

spoils of gold and silver mines. The *encomienda* system created an entire republic of dirt-diggers which reduces labor "to the most vile and lowest exercise that can be imagined, which is to dig and turn over the dirt" (LC 275). The meaningless character of this labor was clearly not the most nefarious aspect of this system, however. The expropriation of the life and liberty of the Indians was, in fact, the great evil. Indeed, the exploitive labor directly caused death and destruction on massive scales. It is this system, Las Casas writes, that has been the cause of the extermination of the Indian populations. The *encomienda* is the "true and effective cause....of the annihilation and decimation of all of these peoples, almost since their discovery" (LC 287). Even when short of killing the Indians, this system humiliated and degraded them. Exploitation had transformed the Indians into something altogether different from their pre-colonial existence. Again, Las Casas perceptively notes that both the kings and masses of the Indians have been reduced to a state of the most oppressed and unfortunate and that, consequently, they are "humiliated, belittled, afflicted, and tormented" (LC 290). The impact of their suffering extends beyond mere physical death (a condition which some of the Indians wished for)²³and includes spiritual death.

Las Casas is clear in his denunciation of the *encomienda* system. It is by establishing a "moral and political edifice" in the most "consummate state of evil" that this system is to be condemned (LC 119). The exploitation of the labor of the Indians employed them as mere instruments serving the colonizer's pursuit of gold. A reversal

²³Suicide was becoming a frequent practice of the colonized Indians. Fernandez de Oviedo takes this as an example of their depravity and inferiority. In their defense Las Casas acknowledges the frequency of suicide but then insists that it is to be explained by "the hellish toils with which they are overwhelmed" (LC 257).

of means and ends is at the heart of the destruction of the Indies. "Thus," Las Casas writes, "the Spaniards use the Indians as no more than means and instruments to acquire the gold and wealth they desire and hold for their end" (LC 442). The effect of this reversal of means and ends was the devaluation of Indian's humanity and, conversely, an exaltation of the gold and wealth sought--the latter became the god of the Spaniards. In the eyes of some of the Spaniards, the Indians were no more than animals. The humiliation and degradation of the Indians was justified by their ostensible inferiority. Taking his starting point with Aristotle, the Spanish theologian Sepulveda will exclaim that "in prudence, invention, and every manner of virtue and human sentiment, they are as inferior to Spaniards as children to adults, women to men, the cruel and inhumane to the gentle....finally, I might almost say, as monkeys to human beings" (LC 293). The system of the *encomienda* fostered this mentality and servitude even when not articulated in Sepulveda's manner. Gutierrez reads this, to be sure, as an oppressive and destructive obstacle to Christian life and, as well, to spirituality.

An analysis of alienating labor in the modern world is at the heart of Gutierrez's commentary on the papal encyclical '*Laborem Exercens*' as well. In *Sobre el Trabajo Humano* Gutierrez follows the pope in castigating modern forms of economic production. The perversion of labor, Gutierrez summarizes, is at the heart of this encyclical. This perversion consists in the reversal of means and ends; that is, the well-being and dignity of the human person is sacrificed in the interests of material production and capital (STH 29). The human person is an instrumental means to the demands for accelerated and greater production. "Y esa praxis consistio en anteponer los medios para acrecentar las

riquezas materiales, al hombre 'al cual estos medios deben servir'" (STH 21). Workers are made to serve material things and in the process, the worker is made into a thing. Gutierrez refers to this as alienation: one is made a slave of the fruits of one's labor. "Así lo que debía ser expresión de su dominio de la tierra, los frutos de su trabajo, se hacen extraños y hostiles a la persona humana" (STH 30). The effect of alienation is to destroy the possibility of the worker creatively assuming initiative as the subject and author of her or his work (STH 40). With the pope, Gutierrez contends that such initiative is granted by the mandate of Genesis that humanity, being created in the image of God, is to subdue the earth. Industrial modes of production, on the contrary, only exacerbate the subjugation of humanity by earth, so to speak, by adding the more brutal subjugation of humanity by history and society in the form of oppression.

The Deconstruction of Idols as a Condition for Mysticism

At the origin of premature death caused by violence, servitude, and oppression, Gutierrez contends, lies the worship of idols. The idolatry at work here is more than the idolatrous concealment of Divine incomprehensibility by human images and ideas, that is, the profanation of the transcendence of God. The idolatry that Gutierrez confronts concerns those idols which legitimate and advance exploitation and death.²⁴ Nor is Gutierrez primarily concerned with an idolatrous denial of God's existence. Gutierrez maintains that death-dealing idolatry is a greater threat to Christian faith than the modern

²⁴In traditional Marxist terms, this kind of idolatry is named 'ideology'; ideology in this tradition is certain ideas, beliefs, patterns of interpreting and acting which conceal and legitimate the power and economic interests of particular groups and classes in society over against others.

threat of atheism. More dangerous than the denial of God, idolatry leads to the placing of one's trust in what is other than God: in power, wealth, one's ego, etc.. In the Scriptures, idolatry is seen not merely in terms of one's denial of God, but rather as a way of behavior that violently and unjustly mistreats others. In Psalm 53:1, for example, the fools who say, "There is no God", are corrupt by their "abominable acts." Their idolatry is less their words than their rapacious actions; they who "eat up my people as they eat up bread" deny God by their vicious ways of life (Ps 53:4). "Idolatry is first and foremost a behavior, a practice....This view of idolatry," Gutierrez explains, "has special validity in Latin America. A tragic characteristic of this continent--the only continent in which the majority are at the same time Christian and poor--is the danger of claiming to be able to straddle the issue: to declare oneself in words for the God of Jesus Christ while in practice serving mammon by mistreating and murdering God's favorites, the poor....This attempt, rather than the pure and simple denial of God's existence, is the great challenge to the proclamation of the gospel on our continent" (GL 48-49; TSMYF 32).

The interpretation of idolatry by the prophets, Gutierrez argues, deepens our understanding of these issues. The pursuit of one's own gain leads to a blind disregard of suffering. Jeremiah says: "But your eyes and heart are set on nothing except your own gain; On shedding innocent blood, on practicing oppression and extortion" (Jer 22:17). In the description of Ezekiel, the Jewish leaders have turned Israel into a "bloody city" by acting "like wolves that tear prey, shedding blood and destroying lives to get unjust gain...." (Ez 22:27). The sacrifices of the unjust will not be accepted by God, Sirach maintains: "The Most High approves not the gifts of the godless, nor for their many

sacrifices does he forgive their sins. Like the man who slays a son in his father's presence is he who offers sacrifices from the possessions of the poor" (Sir 34:19-20). The sacrifices offered by the wicked, Gutierrez concludes, are no more than the lives of the poor offered on the altar of an idol (GL 54). The culprit of this violence is avarice and the pursuit of power and glory. This idol will lead Las Casas to conclude that "there is less veneration and worship of God than money" (GL 61). Greed for gold is the sacrilegious passion of the Spanish conquistadors.

It is important to note that the reading of idolatry by Gutierrez is not a condemnation of all non-Christians as pagan idol-worshippers. We would seriously misunderstand Gutierrez if his critique of idolatry was read as a denunciation of 'paganism' or of 'primitive' religious traditions. Instead, Gutierrez insists that idolatry is a permanent temptation "lying in wait for every religious person" (GL 48). The brilliant vision of Las Casas ratifies this interpretation. The shocking and stunning claim of Las Casas is simply that the Christians and not the Indians are the true idolaters. The human sacrifices of the Indians are eclipsed in severity by the human sacrifices of the Spanish. Against the theologian Sepulveda, Las Casas argues: "The Doctor has reckoned ill. In all truth, it would be far more accurate to say that the Spaniards have sacrificed more to their beloved adored goddess Codicia ("greed," "covetousness") every single year that they have been in the Indies after entering each province than the Indians have sacrificed to their gods throughout the Indies in a hundred years" (LC 178). The Spaniards worship the god gold, to whom they sacrifice innocent blood. The insatiable lust for gold is at the heart of the idolatrous actions of the Spanish conquistadors. They

have become "captives and slaves of money," writes Las Casas, "and must do what their lord commands...." (LC 439). According to St. Paul, this greed is idolatry (Col 3:5). Las Casas will then dare to say the salvation of the Christian is more in question than that of the Indian (LC 224).²⁵

In addition to the need to deconstruct the idolatry of greed, Las Casas argues that certain words and terms are in the need of a critical unmasking. The term 'conquest' itself was one such term. The use of this term, he contends, attempts to justify the murder and enslavement of the Indian populations. The acceptance of this term by the Church would amount to a blessing of the violence and, in his words, a "baptizing" of the wars (LC 106). "This term or name, 'conquest', used with regard to all of the lands and realms of the Indies discovered and to be discovered, is a tyrannical, abusive, improper, and hellish term" (LC 108). Related to the critique of the term 'conquest', Las Casas, following in part Francisco de Vitoria, takes issue with illegitimate titles. Some of these include the claim that the emperor is the sovereign of the whole world; that the pope as well is temporal sovereign of the world; that the right to sovereignty came with the discovery; that the barbarians sin against nature; that the Indians have made a free choice in consenting to the conquest; and that God has made a special concession to the Spaniards (LC 335). Gutierrez reads the criticism of these titles by Vitoria as a task of

²⁵While Las Casas is truly a creative thinker and missionary, he is not the only one to see the conquest in this manner. Before Las Casas many Dominican priests were charging that the Spaniards are all in mortal sin because of their cruelty and tyranny. Friar Anton Montesino, for example, passionately reproaches the Spaniards for their vices. "You are all in mortal sin!....Tell me, with what right, with what justice, do you hold these Indians in such cruel and horrible servitude? On what authority have your waged such detestable wars on these people, in their mild, peaceful lands, where your have consumed such infinitudes of them, wreaking upon them this death and unheard-of havoc?...Know for a certainty that in the state in which you are you can no more be saved than Moors or Turks who have not, nor wish to have, the faith of Jesus Christ" (LC 29).

"intellectual hygiene. His conclusion is crisp and clear: none of the titles listed is capable of legitimating the European presence in the Indies" (LC 335). When such intellectual hygiene is lacking the threat of idolatry is insidiously present. When not resisted, idolatry leads to more than intellectual error; it leads to the consecration of violence and death.

Gutierrez has long claimed that theology has been inadequately concerned with this kind of death-dealing idolatry. Instead of solidarity with the non-persons of history and society (the victims of idolatry), modern theology has been concerned with apologetics directed toward non-believers. Liberation theology seeks to reverse this emphasis and attend to those whom the prevailing social order has scarcely regarded as human, namely, the poor and oppressed, despised cultures, ethnicities, and classes. "This challenge, then, unlike that of the nonbeliever, is a call for a revolutionary transformation of the very bases of a dehumanizing society" (PPH 57, 193).

Freedom and Justice as Soil for Spirituality

The violent intrusion of the Spanish, and the dehumanizing servitude and poverty that ensued, was depriving the Indians, Las Casas maintained, of one of the most precious gifts of human nature: freedom. "No power on earth is competent to curtail or cripple the status of the free, as long as the key of justice is maintained, for freedom is the most precious and paramount of all the goods of this temporal world and so beloved and befriended by all creatures sentient and nonsentient, and especially by rational ones" (LC 82). Throughout all the writings of Las Casas the insistence on the essential possession

of freedom rings out loud (LC 75, 80-84). The indispensable requirement of any culture and people is freedom (LC 83). With unflagging consistency Las Casas asserts that the Indians are being deprived of this fragile gift and, thus, are being prevented from coming to know the God of freedom and justice. For Las Casas, and this is the key of the matter, the God of Jesus Christ brings freedom to all, especially the mistreated and oppressed. "By all of which they shall know and appreciate the great value attached by our mighty God and merciful Father to the deliverance of the oppressed, the succor of the anguished, and the salvation and redemption of souls, for whose remedy the Son of God came upon earth, fasted and hungered here, took his repose and preached, and at last, died, together with the other merciful exploits he accomplished" (LC 81). The bold claim of Las Casas is that God brings deliverance and freedom to all people, not simply Christians. The fact that human beings are created in the image of God warrants treatment of all persons with dignity and respect.²⁶

In the theology of Gutierrez, the significance of liberty is grounded in his vision of spirituality. No doubt, there is much that he has learned from the insights of the modern traditions stemming from the Enlightenment. Still, at its core, freedom is a biblical and spiritual notion, he contends. Liberation from oppression and injustice has roots in Scripture, most poignantly illustrated by the story of *Exodus*, but also by the New Testament. We have seen that at the heart of Gutierrez's reading of spirituality is love.

²⁶Las Casas insists that even the barbarians "have been created in the image of God and are never so utterly abandoned by divine providence as to be incapable of entering the Kingdom of Christ—as they are our siblings—and redeemed by the most precious blood of Christ" (LC 296). Las Casas contends that Aristotle lacked the light of the Christian truth and charity and, thus, was unable to recognize the truth implicit in this thesis, namely, that all human beings, including slaves and women, are equally formed in the image of God (LC 297).

A crucial companion to love is freedom, he maintains. Spirituality is characterized by a bold love that is free from the law (WDOW 91). According to St. James we are to "speak and act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty" (James 2:12). Gutierrez interprets the portrayal of Jesus by the gospel of John along the lines of freedom. Jesus "*freely* decides to give his life in *solidarity* with those who are under the power of death" (WDOW 92). Most clearly, Paul presents us with a picture of a life liberated by Christ. The distinction between 'freedom from' and 'freedom for' expresses well the heart of Christian spirituality. For Gutierrez, this distinction calls to mind freedom from sin, selfishness, injustice, and oppression, on the one hand, and freedom for love and service to others, on the other (WDOW 92). In this reading, freedom is neither bondage nor libertinism. The importance of freedom permits Las Casas, for example, to insist that at the heart of justice is consent (LC 14). Since the Indian peoples have not consented to the European presence, it is illegitimate and unjust. The insistence on the demand for justice, on the other hand, prevents freedom from being reduced to mere libertinism or, in modern terms, to 'rights'.²⁷ As Gutierrez says: "Human rights, to be sure. But not in a *laissez-faire*, liberal, merely formally egalitarian perspective; rather, along the lines of the rights of the poor, who are condemned to death and destruction by the oppressor whose quest is for gold" (LC 44). Christian spirituality must operate, Gutierrez implies, between these erroneous extremes of bondage and libertinism.

Therefore, Christian spirituality and mysticism have before them the task of

²⁷The claim that mysticism is associated with a extreme libertinism was often the reason for the condemnation of certain mystical thinkers. When Marguerite of Porete, for example, spoke of 'taking leave of the virtues' she was charged with advocating a licentious and dissolute way of life.

instilling a spirit of love and freedom into conditions of oppression and injustice. Any form of social and political analysis, Gutierrez holds, must operate under the guidance of spiritual discernment and training. Spirituality has the task of enriching, not obstructing, our analysis of the situation of the poor and oppressed. Social analysis has the task of studying the concrete conditions required for a historical transformation (LC 288). "Las causas estructurales de la injusticia social no deben ser ocultadas, por el contrario hay que senalarlas, analizarlas y transformarlas" (STH 53). Social analysis plays a part in preparing the soil so that human persons can grow and thrive. Among other reasons, what Gutierrez finds so admirable about Las Casas is the Dominican's concrete insights into the causes of the poverty and oppression of the Indians. "Bartolome's conviction prevents him from simply protesting against particular injustices and leads him to add to that protest what in contemporary terms we would call a social analysis" (LC 288). In the case of both Las Casas and Gutierrez, this type of social analysis is, at its roots, a spirituality.

Memory and Cultural Traditions as Soil for Spirituality

Against a modern, liberal notion of freedom Gutierrez insists that without memory of the past, freedom is a truncated and impoverished notion (PPH 12). An important element in Gutierrez's interpretation of spirituality concerns the memory of the past and, in particular, of non-European cultures and traditions. The popular religious beliefs and

practices of indigenous peoples augment and enrich the western spiritual traditions.²⁸ The nurturing of rootedness, thus, includes both the presence of freedom and justice as well as the memory and preservation of the resources of the dead. Using a very traditional metaphor (from Plato), Gutierrez claims that "the human being is like a plant: to stay alive, the human being, too, needs to sink his or her roots in the earth" (LC 79). The violence perpetrated against the Indians uproots these communities from their participation in their natural and cultural contexts. Las Casas charges that the displacement of persons from the place of their birth to unfamiliar locations of servitude (i.e., the mines) has wreaked havoc in the lives and cultures of the Indians (LC 79). Oppression divests the victims of injustice of memory, culture, and tradition. "A people afflicted with amnesia are an unstable people..." Gutierrez writes, "Conquerors always try to erase or block the memory of those whose necks they have bent" (LC 413). The obliteration of memory, or amnesia, renders impotent the ability of a people to resist. It is an effective instrument of subjugation (LC 415).

The task of a liberation spirituality, then, is to retrieve marginalized and subjugated voices. Rereading history from the perspective of the vanquished (the underside of history) is a crucial step in the remaking of history. The recovery of the "scourged Christs of America" lends spirituality a subversive character (PPH 20-21). This

²⁸Gutierrez notes that the voices of the indigenous and poor peoples are almost inaudible due to the oral and fragmentary form of their traditions. Not always in written form, but more often through oral customs, rituals, laments, myths, narratives, festivals, etc. are the voices of the dispossessed articulated. Via these kinds of genres and forms, truth is expressed. Along these lines, it is important to provide a caveat to those contemporary discussions which focus on the importance of writing instead of oral communication. Too often, the modern world has consigned entire cultures and traditions to the status of 'primitive' and 'archaic' when they have lacked written language.

subversive character of spirituality is, nonetheless, one grounded in a traditional theological position, namely, that God embraces the most afflicted and abandoned of history. In the words of Las Casas, "God has a very fresh and living memory of the smallest and most forgotten" (LC 194). While the dominant social and political orders forget the dignity of the least of society, God's memory is unflagging. Gutierrez appeals to the Old Testament/Hebrew bible to substantiate this point. At the heart of the history of Israel is the demand to remember: to remember that they were once an enslaved people and, subsequently, that God heard their cries and liberated them from oppression (LC 221; Exodus 13:3; Deut 15:15). For Las Casas, the forgetfulness of the Spaniards is most reprehensible in failing to observe the central Christian precept: love of neighbor (*agape*). "What memory must there be of that precept of charity, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself', among persons so oblivious of being Christians, or even human, that they have dealt with humanity in these human beings?" (LC 221).

The retrieval of forgotten voices and persons (or non-persons) comprises the heart of the liberation spirituality of Gutierrez. Gutierrez argues that this is an essential aspect of any spirituality and mysticism. "The vigorous existence of local churches in places geographically and culturally far removed from Europe, the force of their voices, containing accents of pain and hope, the contribution of their theological reflection and the new challenges this brings represent the most important event for the Christian faith in these last years of the second millennium of its history. This is the context in which we must discuss the subject of mysticism and oppression" (MIC 82). These global issues, thus, constitute an original contribution to the study of Christian spirituality and

mysticism. While demanding a refinement of popular beliefs and practices (insofar as mysticism includes an element of idolatry-critique), the mystical element of Gutierrez's theology insists that the language of contemplation is enriched by the popular faith of indigenous and non-European cultures (OJ 95). The mystical element of Gutierrez's work is grounded in an affirmation of the gratuitous love of God, a gratuity that is manifested as an option for the outcasts and poor of history and society (MIC 89). Attention to despised cultures, ethnicities, and classes is a key element in Gutierrez's understanding of mysticism (insofar as God is revealed in the midst of such groups). Such attention has the establishment of justice as its primary aim and justice, Gutierrez says, is a "condition for attaining the face-to-face vision of God" (LC 10).

Insofar as mysticism is associated with the love of God in a key of peace, hope, and joy (in the understanding of Gutierrez), mysticism is faith in the risen Christ. This faith in resurrection is never complete, however, without heeding the voices of those who bear the cross. "Faith in the risen Christ is nourished by the experience of suffering, death and also of hope among the poor and oppressed, by their way of relating to each other and to nature, by their cultural and religious expressions....Going to the roots ensures creativity, renews the tree. At the heart of a situation that excludes them and strips them of everything, and from which they seek to free themselves, the poor and oppressed believe in the God of life. Rilke was right when he said that God is in the roots" (MIC 89).

Spirituality of Work

With the cultivation of freedom, justice, and memory there emerges the realistic possibility of work becoming a spiritual exercise. In such a milieu, workers may reap of the fruit they sow. Gutierrez quotes Isaiah, "they shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat....They shall not labor in vain..." (PPH 32; Isaiah 65:21, 23). Against a romantic version of such an image of work, Gutierrez insists that in every act of work there is pain and struggle. Gutierrez maintains that it is social oppression and exploitation which pulverizes the human spirit, not the natural experience of fatigue. Gutierrez quotes the pope's words: "no solo con el esfuerzo y la fatiga personales, *sino tambien* en medio de tantas tensiones, conflictos y crisis que, en relacion con la realidad del trabajo, trastocan la vida de cada sociedad y aun de toda la humanidad" (STH 32-33). Social conflict and crisis is the more dangerous threat to the human spirit than natural suffering. As we have said, however, with the cultivation of the soil for the human person, work can become a spiritual training. By participating in both creation and cross, work takes on a mystical dimension for Gutierrez.

Insofar as work is involved in creation it takes part in the transformation of the world. Gutierrez follows Marx in maintaining that change occurs through the material forces of history and society. An important material force of history is the economic mode of production and the requisite laborers. Analysis of these factors plays an important role in changing the world (rather than merely interpreting it in a purely philosophical mode) (TL 29-30). Concerning these matters, however, the foundation of Gutierrez's position is less the work of Marx than the theological vision of creation (STH

25). For Gutierrez, the significance of work is articulated, even if implicitly, in Genesis. Here humanity is seen as the center of the work of creation and is, thereby, called to continue the act of creation by labor (TL 158; Genesis 1:28). The mandate of Genesis (to subdue the earth) is read by Gutierrez as the dignified call of humanity to transform nature and to enter into relationships with others. "Only in this way does he come to a full consciousness of himself as the subject of creative freedom which is realized through work" (TL 295). Through work, humanity freely exercises a power over nature and history. Conditions of servitude and oppression militate against the mandate of Genesis and, furthermore, seek to return humanity to the condition of pre-liberated Israel. By working for a just society, humanity exercises its autonomy and self-determining dignity. "By working, transforming the world, breaking out of servitude, building a just society, and assuming his destiny in history, man forges himself" (TL 159).

In addition to taking part in creation, work is a bearing of the cross, for Gutierrez. If we simply read work in terms of creation, we may potentially overestimate and overvalue the freedom of the human person via nature. The cross makes this impossible. The cross illuminates the vulnerability and dependency of human nature, Gutierrez contends. It makes evident the conditional character of human 'lordship' over creation. "Senorio si, pero dependencia tambien, respecto de Dios y de los demas" (STH 59). Human freedom is never a libertinism that disregards our dependency on and obligations towards God and others. The experience of suffering in work brings us into contact with our finitude and fragility. It is a participation in the cross. "En el trabajo humano el cristiano descubre una pequena parte de la cruz de Cristo y la acepta con el mismo

espíritu de rendición..." (STH 60). Via the cross, we are brought into contact with God and others. "En este caso el trabajo es el lugar de...acción distintiva del ser humano, el trabajo nos pone en relación con Dios y contribuye a la creación de un mundo fraterno.

Por ser lugar de encuentro con el Señor y con los demás, por tener una ubicación en la obra de la salvación, el trabajo tiene--fuera de otras--una dimensión espiritual en el sentido que hemos recordado" (STH 58). Work is, then, the location of an encounter with God and others. It is a spiritual exercise that participates in both creation and cross. The tension between human freedom and dependency is at the heart of Gutierrez's spirituality of work.

The key to his reflections on this matter is that work is a way of life that is, in particular, a manner of being Christian. Work is a Christian spiritual exercise. As Gutierrez sees it, work has a Christian character due to the integral union of body and spirit in the Christian tradition. The spirituality of work resists the dualistic split between body and spirit (STH 57). In taking on human flesh, the incarnate Christ affirms the dignity of both human realities. Spirituality is concerned with the totality of the human person. Prior to his public ministry, along these lines, Jesus himself engaged in manual labor as a carpenter and provides us with an example. "Jesus no solo lo anunciaba sino que ante todo, cumplía con el trabajo, el 'evangelio' confiado a él, la palabra de la Sabiduría eterna" (STH 34). Thus, in addition to including the life of laborers into his parables, Jesus became a laborer himself. For Gutierrez, the significance of these factors confirms the claim that in Christianity there is a new way of thinking, acting, and valuing, particularly in relation to human work. The spirituality of work is an expression of the

richness of Christian truth, Gutierrez contends. "Precisamente estas afirmaciones basicas sobre el trabajo han surgido siempre de la riqueza de la verdad cristiana, especialmente del mensaje mismo del 'Evangelio del trabajo', creando el fundamento del nuevo modo humano de pensar, de valorar, y de actuar" (STH 36). This new way of life inspired by a spirituality of work brings the human person into contact with both suffering and creative freedom. At the heart of Christian spirituality and mysticism, contends Gutierrez, lies this encounter with God through both cross and creative, liberating love.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE MYSTICAL-PROPHETIC THOUGHT OF SIMONE WEIL AND GUSTAVO
GUTIERREZ: REFLECTIONS ON THE MYSTERY AND HIDDENNESS OF GOD

VOLUME TWO

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

EDWARD ALEXANDER NAVA

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

JUNE 1997

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PROPHETIC TRAGIC THOUGHT OF SIMONE WEIL: REFLECTIONS ON THE HIDDEN GOD

In light of the harsh and terrifying presence of affliction and evil in history and nature, the question of God's absence or hiddenness confronts theology with an unavoidable urgency. Insofar as theology is a form of critical reflection on God, it must attempt to confront the question of evil in relation to the goodness and omnipotence of God (theodicy) in an honest and courageous manner. The reality of evil can only be evaded at the price of theological dishonesty or complacency in the face of unjust suffering. Religion becomes no more than a consoling opiate when the dark face of existence is disregarded. Perhaps even more damaging in this regard, however, would be the suspicion of a failure of theology to adequately interpret a central symbol of Christianity, namely, the cross. Such a theological failure would hold for the interpretation of the Hebrew bible as well, especially the *Psalms*, *Job*, *Lamentations*, and the prophets. In these texts, an interpretation of the God who hides himself irrepressibly emerges from the experience of Israel's oppression and suffering. God appears to be

absent from the struggles and cries of the afflicted.¹ A reading of God's hiddenness arises, then, both from the experiences of affliction and evil in human life, on the one hand, and from the Scriptures of Jews and Christians themselves, on the other.

Liberation theology is one form of contemporary thought which creatively and honestly faces the reality of global suffering and oppression in relation to the hiddenness of God. Reflection on God is interpreted in light of the struggles of the excluded, marginalized and colonized peoples, especially of the 'third world'. The impact of power and violence in history and society, as in colonialism, receives thoughtful attention by such liberationist thinkers. For Christian liberation theologians, the manifestation of God in history and society is located where God is most seemingly absent: in the faces of whole crucified peoples. God is manifested in hiddenness, namely, in locations of poverty, death and suffering. According to Gustavo Gutierrez, for example, theology must be nourished by the manifestation of God in the weakness and scandal of the cross. "But, again like Job, we cannot keep quiet; we must humbly allow the cry of Jesus on the cross to echo through history and nourish our theological efforts" (OJ 103). Central to many of the liberation theologians is the intimation that in order to most persuasively speak of the living and liberating God, the reality of death-dealing evil must be confronted. In the face of evil, God seems to be absent from, or indifferent to, suffering in history and nature. The reality of affliction, thus, makes reflection on the hiddenness

¹"Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? In arrogance the wicked persecute the poor--let them be caught in the schemes they have devised...Rise up, O Lord; O God, lift up your hand; do not forget the oppressed" (Psalms 10:1-2,12). With the prophets the hiddenness of God often expresses God's anger at the sins of the people. Isaiah pleads with God to forget his anger and to return to God's people. "There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity" (Isaiah 64:7).

or absence of God a necessity in our contemporary context.

In the liberation theologians, the confrontation with a 'presence of absence'² is not reduced to a struggle with suffering at a personal, existential level. The abyss or horror of suffering is most threatening in historical and natural events, such as global imperialism and colonialism, the Holocaust, and countless other violent events of affliction. Simone Weil notes that "relentless necessity, misery, distress, the crushing burden of poverty and of exhausting labor, cruelty, torture, violent death, constraint, terror, disease" are all the effect of the hiddenness of God in history and nature (NB 401). We have seen in chapter two that Weil names this presence of God's absence, void. In this chapter I hope to develop Weil's thought on the void or absence of God in relation to the hiddenness of God.

Far from generating an apathetic philosophy, sensitivity to the void or the hiddenness of God by both Weil and the liberationists gives birth to a creative attention to where God is most truly revealed: in cross, negativity, conflict, suffering. Unlike certain forms of theism, Weil insists that the struggle with the hiddenness of God resists the temptation to find a theoretical explanation to the problem of evil or to rationally justify God's existence. In succumbing to this temptation, modern forms of theism too often evade the reality of affliction in spite of, or perhaps because of, the creation of modern,

²This phrase the 'presence of absence' is taken from Levinas. His understanding of the 'there is' is very similar to the understanding of the void or the hiddenness of God in Simone Weil. Levinas explains that 'there is' is an impersonal and anonymous darkness. This absence interrupts all totalizing systems of rational thought. It is a silence. "But this universal absence is in its turn a presence, an absolutely unavoidable presence. It is not the dialectical counterpart of absence, and we do not grasp it through a thought. It is immediately there. There is no discourse. Nothing responds to us, but this silence; the voice of this silence is understood and frightens like the silence of those infinite spaces Pascal speaks of." See his essay "There is: Existence without Existents" in The Levinas Reader ed. by Sean Hand (Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 1989) 30.

argumentative solutions to the problem of evil or 'theodicy'.³ Philosophical atheism and agnosticism certainly are no more thoughtful on the question of evil than modern theism. God's existence is often denied or ignored on explicitly rational grounds. Missing from their accounts is a creative reflection which seeks to confront and inspire resistance against the crescendo of evil in our time.

Simone Weil argues that modern forms of theodicy are often idolatrous subterfuges which distract and avert our gaze from human affliction. The destruction of such idols makes a struggle with evil in history and nature, on the one hand, and even with God, on the other, a necessary moment of theological and philosophical thought. The prophetic-tragic thought of Simone Weil reveals an exceptional sensitivity to conflict in human life: from conflict between the human person and society; between humanity and God; and, in the most intense instances, between God and God.

Thus, for Simone Weil the struggle with the hiddenness of God is anything but an apathy and indifference towards either the afflicted or God, as in much of atheism and agnosticism. Indeed, she insists that only those who know God's presence can cogently speak of God's absence (NB 343). Struggle with God's hiddenness is the path to contact with God. "For it seemed to me certain, and I still think so today, that one can never wrestle enough with God if one does so out of pure regard for the truth. Christ likes us to prefer truth to him because, before being Christ, he is truth. If one turns aside from him to go toward the truth, one will not go far before falling into his arms" (WFG 69).

³Along these lines I am indebted to David Tracy's unpublished essay "Evil, Suffering, Hope: The Search for New Forms of Contemporary Theodicy."

In her reading of Greek tragedy, she will claim that wisdom is born only of suffering, pain, struggle; grace comes violently (NB 390).

Struggle with God and the concrete experience of human suffering are necessary encounters for shedding light on the conflict between God and human suffering. Reflection on the question of evil cannot be isolated from the existential confrontation with suffering. The question of evil resists theoretical solutions and brings the intellect to its knees (as a *koan*). For Simone Weil, thus, glimpses of the meaning of suffering will only be detectable through the concrete encounter with suffering. "I feel an ever increasing sense of devastation, both in my intellect and in the center of my heart, at my inability to think with truth at the same time about the affliction of men, the perfection of God, and the link between the two. I have the inner certainty that this truth, if it is ever granted to me, will only be revealed when I myself am physically in affliction..." (SL 178). In such a vision, wisdom is born of suffering.⁴

As we saw in the mystical thought of Weil, moreover, spiritual exercises have the task of, first, emptying the mind and spirit of any idols and, second, of cultivating the attention. In reference to the issue of suffering and evil, no less, spiritual practices train one's attention to make possible a reception of the vision of God (*theoria*) in the face of affliction. Simone Weil insists that rational speculation alone is futile in shedding light on the question of evil. The separation of theory and practice only exacerbates the thoughtlessness on the question of evil fostered by modern forms of theodicy.

⁴Weil often mentions Aeschylus in this regard. See Aeschylus, *The Oresteia: Agamemnon*, verses 176-183, trans. Richmond Lattimore, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953) 40. Weil also mentions Hesiod for the expression of a 'wisdom born of suffering'. See *Work and Days*, verses 195-223, trans. Dorothea Wender (London: Penguin Books, 1973) 65.

Attention to the hiddenness of God in Simone Weil, therefore, proceeds by spiritual exercises and the painful struggle to endure and transform suffering itself. Compassion for the afflicted, for example, is one spiritual exercise which reveals a heightened awareness of God's hiddenness. In Simone Weil, contact with the afflicted (living and dead) is the most significant avenue for contact with God. It is here that God's seeming absence manifests a hidden presence. It is in the faces of afflicted that we discover that the void of God is a greater plenitude than the presence of all worldly entities.⁵ Contact with God is given to us through the hiddenness of God. "Contact with human creatures is given to us through the sense of presence. Contact with God is given to us through the sense of absence. Compared with this absence, presence becomes more absent than absence" (NB 239-40).

There are three major sections of this chapter: first, a clarification of the meaning of the term 'prophetic-tragic'; second, an interpretation of Weil's understanding of the hiddenness of God; finally, an examination of the ethical vision which an interpretation of the hiddenness of God generates will conclude the chapter.

The Relationship of Prophecy and Tragedy

Prophecy

Even while I am arguing that the prophetic and tragic have certain affinities, it does

⁵Lucien Goldmann in The Hidden God: A Study of Tragic Vision in the Pensées of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964) claims that the tension between God's absence and presence is central to a tragic vision. He especially thinks such is the case in Pascal. "But we must add that for Pascal, and for tragic man in general, this hidden God is present in a more real and more important way than any empirical and perceptible being, and that His is the only essential presence that exists. That God should be always absent and always present is the real center of the tragic vision" (p.37).

not follow that they mean the same thing. Such terms are only confused and obscured when they are conflated. The distinctions between these terms is, thus, as important as any affinities.

As mentioned in chapter one, I recognize that the terms 'prophetic', 'prophet' or 'prophecy' are diverse and complicated terms, especially in the broad context of the ancient Near East. Nevertheless, I have been persuaded that it is with the classic Hebrew prophets of the 8th-5th centuries BCE that the unique and distinctive Jewish form of prophecy emerges. The task of prophecy in this context is to proclaim the word of God in history and society in the form of rebuke, exhortation, warning, or counsel to the people. Breaches in the covenant provoke the ire of God and the fury of God's spokesperson, the prophet. While the apathy of others produces blindness and deafness, the prophet is acutely aware of the suffering and affliction of the poor and forgotten. In this case, the target of the prophet's denunciation is the sins of the people. The suffering and oppression that Israel endures is related to the disobedience of the nation.

In spite of this covenantal theology, however, the prophets often intimate that the suffering of Israel is not simply a matter of sin. In the book of Deuteronomy, for example, Yahweh tells Moses (the archetypal prophet): "I shall hide my face from them. I shall see what their end will be" (Deuteronomy 31:17,18;32:20). With this sense of God's hiddenness, Jeremiah complains of his plight in life, of his undeserved suffering. "Why did I come forth from the womb, to see sorrow and pain, to end my days in shame?" (Jeremiah 20:18). In the figure of the 'suffering servant,' Isaiah expresses the cries and woes of one who is innocent, one who is despised and rejected by all, a man

of suffering (Isaiah 53). His suffering is not seen as punishment for sin and disobedience. Elsewhere Isaiah laments what appears to be God's absence. "Where is He who brought them up from the sea with the shepherd of His flock?...Oh that you would rend the heavens, that you would come down..." (Isaiah 63:11-64:2). Isaiah then concludes that God has hidden his face from us (64:6).

Along these lines, Richard Elliot Friedman has creatively argued that the classic Israelite prophets struggle with the hiddenness of God.⁶ Friedman suggests that classic prophecy is born when God is seemingly more removed from earthly affairs. In the classic prophets, God's presence is not revealed in the form of great visible and public miracles as with the plagues in Egypt or in actual visible form as with Jacob's fight with God. Such a dramatic presence of God ended, Friedman argues, with the refusal of God to appear to Elijah at Mt. Horeb/Sinai. Elijah discovers that God is no longer detectable in the crag-shattering wind nor in earthquakes nor fire (1Kings 19). God appears to be more absent from such natural occurrences. Friedman quotes Frank Moore Cross as saying, "The abrupt refusal of Yahweh to appear as in the traditional theophany at Sinai marked the beginning of a new era in his mode of self-disclosure."⁷ No longer will a prophet enjoy the intimacy with God that Moses possessed. There will be a greater distance between God and humanity, a more conspicuous sense of Divine hiddenness. "Never again has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom Yahweh knew face to face" (Deuteronomy 34:10). The refusal of God to appear in visible form, whether that

⁶See Richard Elliot Friedman, The Hidden Face of God (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1995).

⁷ibid, 23.

be in the form of public miracles, angels, or the events of nature marks a new era in the mode of God's revelation. The classic prophets witness to the fact that God's self-disclosure occurs through the word as event within history. Friedman argues, then, that one misunderstands the prophets if one neglects this factor of God's hiddenness.

At the heart of Friedman's position is the claim that prophets do not simply reduce suffering and evil to a matter of sin. Instead, he argues that the prophets struggle with suffering as an effect of sin and God's hiddenness.⁸ Friedman makes it clear, nevertheless, that none of the prophets excuse human behavior for causing much suffering. Amos insists that the injustice and iniquity of the people results in God's abandonment and punishment. Hosea claims that Israel's lust for idols has this effect. Jeremiah maintains that the people's hard hearts will lead to their destruction (Babylonian Exile). Even with this plainly admitted, the prophets often wrestle with the fact of God's anger and wrath. 'How long O Lord?' is a frank plea for God to cease his anger. It is an admission by many of the prophets of the seeming injustice of suffering and evil. Of course, this will become a more central issue in the wisdom literature of the Psalms, Lamentations and Job (and Greek tragedy). It is not entirely absent, however, from the prophets.

In the classic prophets, therefore, suffering is seen in terms of both sin and God's inscrutable providence. The prophets, as with Amos for example, are sensitive to the visible hiddenness of God in the conflict and injustices of society and nature. The

⁸"Another reason why we cannot explain the disappearance of God solely as punishment for sin is that sin does not necessarily call for divine abandonment, as opposed to some direct physical chastisement" (ibid. 97).

prophets express an exceptional sensitivity to suffering and evil in history. An awareness of the presence of power, violence, conquest and oppression in history is central to their extraordinary visions. In this light, the suffering of the poor and dispossessed is more than a matter of the people's sin. For the prophets an acute awareness of God's hiddenness leads them to intimate that the ravaging of terror and violence in history is not simply intelligible within the reward-punishment framework of covenantal theology, even if the sins of the people clearly play an important role.

While Christianity insists on the continuity with the 'Old Testament', new interpretations of prophecy emerge with the Christian tradition. If the 'prophetic' can only be defined in relationship to the Jewish Scriptures then all of Christianity, and especially Simone Weil, would not qualify as 'prophetic'. Of course, I do believe that it is legitimate to speak of a 'prophetic' character in the Christian tradition, even if it developed in a new fashion.

Central to the Christian preservation and augmentation of the prophetic tradition is the claim that the Word of God is manifested within a historical event. In the Jewish prophets, the word of God comes to a human mediator, whereas the Christian tradition confesses that the Word of God is incarnate in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Whereas the Jewish prophets are messengers of a Divine word to the nation Israel, Jesus the Christ is interpreted as the Word of God to all nations and peoples. The Apostle Paul, for example, preaches 'Christ Crucified' as the Word of God to all people, gentile or Jew, slave or free, woman or man. If the prophet is a spokesman of God on behalf of the covenant, then for Christians the prophet is the spokesman of God on behalf

of the new covenant established by Christ.

Finally, the prophetic character of Christianity is most evident in the tradition of the theology of the cross. In this case, as with the Jewish prophets, the manifestation of God occurs in hiddenness. The historical event of the suffering and death of Christ is the central location of God's self-disclosure. God is not primarily revealed in visible, beautiful form (i.e. nature). Instead, God is revealed in the midst of conflict, negativity and suffering. God seems to be visibly absent, only discernible to those who look to the underside of history, to locations of poverty and suffering. In the theological tradition, the Protestant Reformers emphasized this aspect of Christianity. Luther and Calvin insist that if one only follows the guidance of human reason, in relation to observable events in nature and history, one will conclude that either there is no God or that God is unjust.⁹ In order for the worship of the true God to be possible, one must turn to God's Word disclosed in Scripture. For Luther, this self-disclosure of God's Word occurs most fully in the filth and darkness of the world (i.e. at the *cloaca*).¹⁰

⁹In *Bondage of the Will* Luther says: "God governs the external affairs of the world in such a way that, if you regard and follow the judgement of human reason, you are forced to say, either that there is not God, or that God is unjust..." See *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings* ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor Books, 1962) 201. Calvin, too, insists that contemplation on history and nature (without Scripture) leads, if not to atheism, then to the worship of an unknown god (idolatry) (See William Bouwsma's biography *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 154). In the *Pensees* trans. A.J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin Books, 1966) Pascal, as well, claims that Scripture "says that God is a hidden God, and that since nature was corrupted he has left men to their blindness, from which they can escape only through Jesus Christ, without whom all communication with God is broken off" (p.264). Nature in Pascal is infinite spaces and eternal silences, not the book of nature as for many of the medievals.

¹⁰As is well known Luther's breakthrough supposedly occurred at the toilet or *cloaca*. Whether or not Luther was actually referring to a toilet (more than likely it was a reference to the study room above the toilet), Luther's point is clear: where humanity is most weak, vulnerable, and filthy there God is most strong. See Heiko A. Oberman *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 155-56.

Tragedy

Tragedy is no less a complicated issue than prophecy. From the outset it is important to challenge the common assumption that tragedy is necessarily fatalistic and despairing. In the plays of the great tragedian Aeschylus, for example, a portrayal of the bitter role of violence and force in human life does not preclude him from ending his works, as in the *Oresteia* for example, with a hopeful resolution. The founding of the courts of justice at the end of the *Eumenides* gives us hope that the cycle of revenge and violence will be broken by the strong, yet gentle presence of persuasion.¹¹

Simone Weil claims that an awareness of the presence of misery and suffering in human life is the genius of the 'bitterness' of the Greeks. Such a bitterness cannot be equated with a despairing fatalism or sadness, she insists. In reference to Greek poetry she maintains that "no matter how painful they are, these dramas never leave us with an impression of sadness" (ICAG 19). Indeed, she will insist that it is with the moderns that a despairing sadness dominates the interpretation of tragedy. "I cannot accept any catastrophic interpretation of Greece and its history...True, their conception of existence was a bitter one, as it is for all whose eyes are open; but their bitterness had a motive; it had meaning *in relation to* the happiness for which man is made and of which he is deprived by the harsh constraints of this world...Whereas there are so many modern people...in whom sadness is connected with a loss of the very instinct for happiness; they feel a need to annihilate themselves" (SL 122-23). In short, Greek tragedy was not

¹¹Yet again I am indebted to the insight of David Tracy on his reading of Greek tragedy. See his forthcoming book on naming and thinking God.

nihilistic; nor is Weil's tragic vision.¹² Indeed, for Weil, the genius of Greek tragedy is the beauty of the poetry. In an honest and artistic fashion it illuminates the truth of the human condition in a way which refuses to ignore the dark and brutal forces in history and nature.

In a similar manner, Nietzsche's contribution to the interpretation of tragedy revolves around his refusal to reduce tragedy to nihilism. Nietzsche claims that tragedy is far from the world-negating resignationism advanced by his teacher Schopenhauer. For Nietzsche, tragedy is an elevating, inspiring, even ecstatic genre which leads to an embrace of the world in all its beauty and pain. As an aesthetic phenomenon, especially related to music, tragedy justifies and affirms the meaningfulness of human life. Tragedy gives rise to an instinctive, Dionysian joy through an acceptance of the transient and dark face of existence (*amor fati*). At the heart of the Greek tragedian's attention to the "image of everything underlying existence that is frightful, evil, a riddle, destructive, fatal", Nietzsche maintains, is "joy, strength, overflowing health, overgreat fullness."¹³ Tragedy, for Nietzsche, is "an intellectual predilection for the hard, gruesome, evil, problematic aspect of existence, prompted by well-being, by overflowing health, by the *fullness* of existence."¹⁴

Of course, there are some major differences separating Nietzsche and Weil on

¹²Louis Ruprecht, in Tragic Posture and Tragic Vision (New York: Continuum, 1994) has argued that the belief that tragedy is simply fatalistic is a tragic posture not an honest tragic vision. He is right to insist that one can take suffering very seriously without having an understanding of life which ends in despair and gloom (p.101).

¹³The Birth of Tragedy trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967) 21.

¹⁴ibid, 17.

'tragedy'. A major one is that Nietzsche interpreted Christianity as a continuation of the 'Greek cheerfulness' of Plato. The world-view of Christianity champions a "womanish flight from seriousness and terror."¹⁵ For this reason, Nietzsche argues that Christianity is irreconcilable with tragedy. We will see how Simone Weil's reading of the passion narratives, and concomitantly of the hidden God, seriously calls into question this rather unexamined assumption of Nietzsche.¹⁶ The other major difference between these two thinkers concerns the importance of ethics in Weil's reading of tragedy. For Nietzsche, tragedy is exclusively an aesthetic phenomenon, whereas Weil insists that a tragic depiction of the human condition is to inspire compassion and justice.¹⁷

Finally, Paul Ricoeur contributes to our understanding of the theology of tragedy. Ricoeur insists that a tragic vision of humanity is only the other side of a tragic vision of the divine.¹⁸ Tragic theology is inseparable from the tragic vision of human history and nature. Central to this tragic theology, he maintains, is the ambiguity of the gods, "the non-distinction between the divine and the diabolical."¹⁹ In this vision, humanity

¹⁵ibid, 78.

¹⁶In The Hidden God: A Study of Tragic Vision in the Pensees of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), Lucien Goldmann argues, not unlike Simone Weil, that Christianity is reconcilable with a tragic vision. "Certainly, by its idea of a God who dies but who is immortal, and by the paradox of a God made man, by its idea of mediation and by its insistence upon the folly of the Cross, Christianity is particularly susceptible to a tragic interpretation" (p.76).

¹⁷Margaret Farley's book Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990) is a good example of the significance of compassion for the tragic vision. See pp.27,69,79,81-82,112.

¹⁸Paul Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967) 212.

¹⁹ibid, 214. In addition to Greek tragedy, Ricoeur notes that Babylonian myth expresses a similar ambiguity of the divine. Enlil, for instance, by turns spreads terror and trust (ibid, 181). Marduk also is interpreted as the cause of both creation and destruction (ibid, 182).

is led to destruction through a blindness that is conceived of as the fault of divine initiative. In tragedy, such a divine malevolence has two poles, Ricoeur continues, an impersonal one in fate and a personal one in the will of the gods.²⁰ In the case of the former, necessity reveals a blindness and indifference to human values, the sun shines on the good and bad alike.²¹ With regard to the will of the gods, tragedy shields the hero from moral condemnation and offers him or her as an object of pity. The initiative of the gods is held culpable. Compassion is thereby invoked in the hearts of the spectators, who are called to empathize with the plight of the person crushed by the gods.²²

Ricoeur concludes that tragedy properly emerges only when the theme of predestination to evil comes up against the theme of heroic freedom and greatness. The conflict between fate and freedom, between the will of the gods and the protests of the hero is displayed in tragedy proper.²³ The complexity and unruliness of tragic theology demands expression in non-rational forms such as myth, narrative and drama. The ambiguity of the gods or the unresolvable tension between fate and freedom make evident the *unthinkable* character of tragedy, for Ricoeur. At the level of rational thought it is unthinkable (and thus for Plato unacceptable), but in terms of the human experience of

²⁰ibid, 217.

²¹ibid, 323.

²²ibid, 219. As an example, Ricoeur mentions the extraordinary ability of Aeschylus in The Persians to rise above a celebration of Greek victory and to lament the catastrophe of the Persians. In the figure of Xerxes, Aeschylus does not merely see an enemy, but rather one who has been crushed by the gods. In the words of Xerxes: "What began all our misfortune, distress was an avenging genius, an evil god, appearing from I know not where."

²³ibid, 218. Ricoeur mentions the case of the hero Prometheus confronting and resisting the will of Zeus in Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound.

evil in history and nature the tragic vision is also "invincible."²⁴

To sum up thus far: central to my use of the term 'tragic' is an awareness of the presence of suffering, force, violence and evil in human history and nature.²⁵ When this awareness is expressed in artistic form as drama, narrative, poetry, myth, symbol, etc. it can be considered tragedy. Thus, tragedy is not simply suffering *per se*. It is the creative and thoughtful attention to misery and suffering in the human condition. Further, an important facet of tragedy includes both the possibility of a hopeful reconciliation and an ethics of compassion and justice.

It is important to emphasize that in contrast to the prophetic tradition in Judaism and Christianity, tragedy avoids the suggestion that human suffering and evil is the simple result of sin. In Judaism and Christianity the idea of redemption is related (even if not exclusively) to the forgiveness of sin. In Greek tragedy, the presence of suffering and violence is not moralized in the same manner. An important part of Weil's reading of tragedy is the claim that evil and suffering occur to human being often as the result of chance. A seemingly chaotic force metes out pain and suffering to some and well-being to others. Weil insists that the mystery of suffering is debased when reduced to a matter of sin. Weil's reading of the tragic vision will insist that before suffering is the result of sin, it is inexplicable mystery. Along these lines, Lucien Goldmann claims that tragedy

²⁴ibid, 327.

²⁵Ruprecht's book Tragic Posture and Tragic Vision, op.cit., includes an interesting reading of Hegel's understanding of tragedy. Ruprecht shows that central to Hegel's interpretation of tragedy is the idea of conflict. The idea that there is more than one will in the world leads Hegel to detect not only conflict on a horizontal (historical) level, but also in the vertical dimension. In other words, conflict between humanity and God, and even within God, is important to the Lutheran Hegel. See pp.34,42,65,91,84-87.

is a "universe of agonizing questions to which man has no reply."²⁶

As we will see, equally important to Weil's interpretation of tragedy is that human nature is vulnerable and fragile in the face of force and affliction. Radical suffering has the power to actually destroy the body and spirit of the human person.

Prophetic-Tragic Thought

In confronting the absence or hiddenness of God in history and nature, Simone Weil articulates both a prophetic and tragic vision of Christianity. With regard to the prophetic, however, a persuasive case could be made to disqualify Weil from such a title. After all, her reflections on the Jewish prophetic tradition are not only tendentious, but more often shallow and close-minded. I do not want to shield Weil from deserved criticisms. Indeed the greatest flaw in her extraordinary thought is her narrow reading of the Hebrew bible/Old Testament.

If, however, we understand the 'prophetic' to involve a Christian theology of the cross in which the self-disclosure of God's Word is located in historical conflict, struggle, suffering, and cross then the title of 'prophetic' is not inappropriately imputed to Weil's thought. In Weil, this prophetic element is clearly related to a tragic sensibility. Her reading of the passion narratives is an attempt to reconcile the prophetic element of Christianity and the tragic element of the Greeks. Along these lines, her reading of the crucifixion of Christ maintains that the death of God at the cross is not merely a

²⁶See Lucien Goldmann, *The Hidden God*, op.cit., 42. Goldmann also makes a contrast between a dialectical and tragic vision. Whereas dialectical thought interprets God's presence in actual historical events and occurrences, tragedy is more mythical and a-historical. See chapter seven of this dissertation for the development of this contrast in relation to Gustavo Gutierrez and Simone Weil.

redemption of human sin, but is also the divine response to the question of suffering and evil. In other words, the mystery of evil still eludes rational understanding, but in the example of Christ the Christian is inspired to respond to suffering by thoughtful praxis. I believe that this prophetic-tragic vision is a creative and important project.

Thus, in her development of a prophetic-tragic thought, Weil seeks to do justice to the understanding of suffering and evil as related to sin (and thus redemption), on the one hand, and to the chaotic presence of force and evil, on the other. I hope to explain this further in relation to the hiddenness of God 1 and 2.

The Hiddenness of God in Simone Weil

An interpretation of the void and absence of God in the thought of Simone Weil may be fruitfully illumined by studying this central element of her thought in relation to the prophetic-tragic hiddenness of God. One of the major points of convergence between prophetic and tragic traditions concerns the attention to conflict, violence, and suffering in history and nature.²⁷ While the tragic vision displays a greater pessimism regarding history than the prophetic, the attention to conflict and force is shared by these traditions (though in regards to her reading of the Hebrew bible, the tragic eclipses the prophetic). One way of reading these two different traditions in the thought of Weil is to associate

²⁷The sense of conflict in Weil is interpreted at three different levels: first, conflict in society and history; second, conflict between humanity and God; lastly, conflict within God. I have already dealt in part with the first sense of conflict in relation to social oppression and work (chapter two). Weil explicitly relates this sense of conflict to class struggle. "What is well founded, vital, and essential is the eternal struggle of those who obey against those who command when the mechanism of social power involves a disregard for the human dignity of the former. It is an eternal struggle because those who command are always inclined, whether they know it or not, to trample on the human dignity of those below them...The tension between pressure from below and resistance from above creates and maintains an unstable equilibrium, which defines at each moment the structure of society" (MA 229). In this chapter I hope to also illuminate the second and third sense of conflict in Weil

them with the categories of hiddenness 1 and 2, as developed in the work of B.A. Gerrish and David Tracy.

Gerrish claims that in the thought of Luther, for example, there is an uneasy tension between the hidden knowledge of God manifested in the historical, incarnate and crucified Word of Jesus Christ, on the one hand, and a hidden knowledge of God outside of Jesus Christ, on the other. He has helpfully referred to these as hiddenness 1 and 2, respectively.²⁸ Hiddenness 1 articulates a classic theology of the cross championed in a creative way by Luther. In this tradition, God is disclosed in hiddenness: in the folly and scandal of cross and death. The glory of Christ is not recognizable in visibly dramatic nor beautiful ways. Far from the object of adoration, Christ is the object of scorn, revulsion and disgust. Christ's glory is hidden beneath affliction.

Hiddenness 2 is more disturbing and problematic. In his most troubled moments, Luther suggests that even after the historical manifestation of God in Christ, there is much that remains unknown about God. The "concealed and dreadful will of God...", Luther says, remains "the most awesome secret of the divine majesty."²⁹ Why is the hidden will of God dreadful for Luther? One aspect of that answer concerns the question of predestination. The dreadful will of God is none other than the decision of God to consign a portion of humanity to perdition. While the incarnate God does not desire the death of the sinner, the *Deus Absconditus* damns a majority of the human race. Luther: "He does not will the death of the sinner--in his Word, that is. But he does will it by that

²⁸See B.A. Gerrish The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982) 134.

²⁹ibid. 136. See Luther's Bondage of the Will, op.cit.

inscrutable will."³⁰ Is there a struggle within God himself between contradictory elements of mercy and wrath or hiddenness 1 and 2, respectively? Does the death of Christ on the cross reveal a God struggling on behalf of humanity against the wrath of an unknown God?

David Tracy sums up the importance of the issue of hiddenness 2 very well: "At the very least, this literally awe-ful and ambivalent sense of God's hiddenness is so overwhelming, so powerful that God is sometimes experienced as purely frightening not tender: sometimes as an impersonal reality of sheer power and energy signified by such metaphors as abyss, chasm, chaos, even horror, sometimes as a violent personal reality...It is Luther (here quite different from even Augustine and Pascal) who will speak of what the ancient Greek tragedians named 'fate' in ways Aeschylus and Sophocles if not Euripides would have understood."³¹ In this manner, the question of the hiddenness of God 2 is an interpretation and confrontation with the absence or violence of God. In the face of destructive evil, the question of theodicy irrepressibly comes to the forefront.

While for Luther the experience of the ambiguity of God and of the ostensible conflict within God is related to the issue of predestination (which he relates to the tragic notion of fate!), for Simone Weil, the conflict is most clearly apparent in the issue of evil and affliction. The seeming chaotic rule of force and violence in history and nature is

³⁰ibid, 137.

³¹See David Tracy, "The Tenderness and Violence of God: The Return of the Hidden God in Contemporary Theology" in the journal *Lumiere et Vie* (Spring 1996). Luther did, indeed, understand the tragic vision of fate. In *Bondage of the Will* Luther explicitly discusses fate in the poets (he mentions Vergil, in particular). In his words: "Those wise men knew, what experience of life proves, that no man's purposes ever go forward as planned, but events overtake all men contrary to their expectation." See *Martin Luther*, op.cit., 183-84.

the source for her reflections on the hiddenness of God. Why God allows affliction and force to destroy human life is the troubling source of her thoughts on the apparent conflict within God. "The great enigma of human life is not suffering but affliction...It is not surprising 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 to possess them as sovereign master" (SNLG 171-72). It is not surprising, then, that Weil notes the fact that the Scriptures speak of a God who both manifests and hides himself. In the Latin she quotes Isaiah 45:15, "'*Vere tu es Deus Absconditus*'...The universe both manifests and hides God" (NB 149, FLNB 161).

As we have seen, the void in Simone Weil is one way she reads the hiddenness of God. More terrifying than the absence of God, however, is the experience of the anger and violence of God toward God's own creation. In the book of *Job*, for example, Job interprets his suffering as the unjust violence of God against him. Daringly Job reads the actions of God in history as seeming chaos and violence. "I was at ease, and he broke me in two; he seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces; he set me up as his target; his archers surround me. He slashes open my kidneys, and shows no mercy; he pours out me gall on the ground. He bursts upon me again; he rushes upon me like a warrior" (16:12-14). It is precisely such a text, along with expressions of divine ambiguity in Greek tragedy, that are the sources for her reflections on the hiddenness of God. She dares to say, in this light, that even the ambiguity of the Greek gods have something to teach us. "The Greek gods--capricious, neither good nor evil, good and evil in turn, more

readily evil than good, worse than man and more powerful. One cannot do without them either" (NB 243). Why can we not do without the Greek gods? After all, are we not repulsed by their bizarre and strange behavior? What could the myths of conflict and war among the divine realm contribute to the Christian interpretation of God?

Simone Weil clearly suggests that the seeming ambiguity of the Greek gods is not entirely unlike the tension in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures between the unpredictable anger and wrath of God, on the one hand, and the mercy and forgiveness of God, on the other. As I have suggested, this apparent conflict within God is also detectable in the thought of Luther, though most clearly as related to predestination. Lucien Goldmann claims that such a conflict within God is the mark of the tragic vision.³²

In Weil's interpretation of the conflict between Zeus and Prometheus, for example, the outlines of her thoughts on the conflict within God are put forth. In the Aeschylean version, Zeus reveals his wish to destroy the human species and to sow a new race. In Weil's translation Prometheus says: "And to that (plan to destroy the human race) none made opposition, but only I have dared. I have delivered mortals from the damnation that would have flung them into Hades" (my addition)(ICAG 62).³³ For that defiant act,

³²Lucien Goldmann claims that notice of an ostensible conflict in God is the mark of a tragic vision. Goldmann maintains that while Christian orthodoxy "tends to bring together the two concepts of God...the tragic vision tends to separate them from each other" (The Hidden God, op.cit., 78).

³³While this may seem quite foreign to the notion of the Christian God, it is not as far removed as one might think. The story of Noah is nothing else than a narrative of the destruction of the human race. Moses also pleads with God not to destroy the Israelites in the desert; Abraham persuades God not to destroy the city of Sodom. Weil is aware of these aspects of the Hebrew bible and compares the ambiguity of the Greek gods to these elements. She especially notes the passage in 1 Kings 22:21, where God sends Ahab a 'lying spirit' (NB 580).

however, Prometheus suffers. Again in the words of Prometheus: "Against me the tempest from Zeus, bringing terror advances visible" (ICAG 65). Prometheus confronts the wrath of God. In Weil's reading: "Prometheus suffers because he has loved men too well. He suffers in man's stead. The wrath of God against the human species is entirely carried by him..." (ICAG 67).

The split that occurs between God, Weil avers, is between the Power and Wisdom/Love of God. The dilemma is between the omnipotent God who is the author of all and the powerless God who is only author of good. "God is the author of all; God is only the author of good: we cannot escape from this dilemma" (NB 207). For Weil, this estrangement between God and God is anguish. "In God, at the point where the two opposites, Power and Love, are separated a supreme anguish exists...How are the Most-High God and this crucified corpse going to set about becoming reunited?" (NB 539). Thus, Weil also relates this split to the experience of Christ at the cross confronting the harsh will of God the father. "The idea of a situation where God would be separated from his Wisdom is very strange. But it appears also, although less insistently, in the story of Christ. The Christ accuses His Father of having abandoned Him; and Saint Paul says that Christ has become a curse before God in our stead. At the supreme moment of the Passion, there is an instant where there appears a thing which to human eyes seems a separation, an opposition between the Father and the Son" (ICAG 68).

Weil is right. This is strange and even troubling to our understanding of God. It certainly brought Luther much pain and anguish. In Weil, this sense of divine ambiguity is explicitly related to the issue of evil and affliction. The idea of the hiddenness of God

1 and 2 is not an attempt to explain the presence of evil nor to reject God. It is, rather, an agonizing attempt to confront the inscrutable presence of evil in relation to the love and goodness of God. It is one way of interpreting and grappling with the real ambiguity of human experience: the contradictory realities of violence and peace, death and life, suffering and joy, evil and good, etc.. For Simone Weil, sentimental or nice portrayals of the divine often obscure the more agonizing and terrifying experiences of history. When the tragic face of God is confronted, only then does faith in the tenderness and love of God become a realistic hope for history and nature. The possibility of a reconciliation between the prophetic and tragic elements (hiddenness of God 1 and 2) is not precluded by Weil. The possibility of a re-union between God and God is an important part of Weil's reading of the crucified God in Jesus Christ.

I propose to study this issue in greater depth by relating the prophetic element of Simone Weil to hiddenness 1, on the one hand, and the tragic element of her thought to hiddenness 2, on the other.

The Hiddenness of God 1

The hiddenness of God 1 in Simone Weil is the attention to the revelatory presence of God in locations of God's seeming absence, namely, in the midst of affliction, death, alienation, cross. For Simone Weil, this prophetic understanding is primarily determined by the manifestation of God in Jesus Christ. While Weil assumes the historical reality of Christ, the most profound meaning of the crucifixion of Christ lies in the illumination it sheds on the problem of affliction throughout all time. Christ has been,

is, and will be present wherever affliction occurs. Weil quotes Pascal in this regard: "Jesus will be in agony until the end of the world" (ICAG 70).³⁴ God is most fully present where God is seemingly absent. "Through redemptive suffering God is present in extreme evil. For God's absence is the divine form of presence which corresponds to evil--an absence that is felt" (NB 343). For Weil, it would be impardonable if God was entirely absent from the affliction and terror of human experience. "If the Redemption, with the sensible signs and means corresponding to it, had not been present on this earth from the very beginning, it would not be possible to pardon God...for the affliction of so many innocent people, so many people uprooted, enslaved, tortured, and put to death in the course of centuries preceding the Christian era. Christ is present on this earth...wherever there is crime and affliction" (LTP 17;also WFG 192).

Thus, the Good in Simone Weil is most profoundly revealed at the Cross. This Good is a scandal to reason, natural ethics, culture, society, etc.. This Good is the self-emptying revelation of Love. In a reading of *Eros* in Plato's *Symposium* Weil explains that *Eros* is the child of both Resource/Wisdom (*Poros*) and Lack/Poverty (*Penia*). Weil creatively reads this account of the birth of Love in light of a theology of the cross. The inheritance of Wisdom from his (*sic*) father and the inheritance of Poverty from his mother determines Weil's understanding of Love and Wisdom as self-emptying poverty.³⁵ This is the description Weil gives of Love: "Poverty-stricken Love in the

³⁴Pascal's *Pensees* (London: Penguin Books, 1966) 313. "Jesus will be in agony until the end of the world. There must be no sleeping during that time."

³⁵The interpretation of *Eros* by the Cynics is similar to Weil's reading. For the Cynics Socrates was an embodiment of *Eros*. But the image of *Eros* here was that of a beggar. In the words of Pierre Hadot: "The figure of Socrates as *Eros* the beggar was subsequently taken up by the Cynic philosophers, in particular

Symposium--gaunt, bare-footed, homeless, lying upon the ground, sleeping on doorsteps and on the roadside, with want and penury as companions" (NB 370). This account of Love reminds Weil of St. Francis and Lady Poverty/Christ. "This delicious picture of poor and vagabond Love, always lying upon the bare ground, inevitably reminds us of St. Francis. But before St. Francis, of the Christ who is poor and homeless, having no place to lay his head" (ICAG 129). For Simone Weil, then, the awareness of the hidden God is a recognition that God comes to humanity in the form of a beggar (FLNB 141).

Such a theology of the cross (hiddenness 1) influences Weil's reading of the just person in Plato's *Republic*, as well.³⁶ The person who is truly just (in reality and not simply in appearance) is the one who willingly suffers persecution and public ignominy out of love for justice. In order to discern with accuracy the just person from the unjust one, a show of wealth, power or other forms of visible grandeur must not be allowed to pervert judgement. Judgement must proceed without the falsifying allure of glory and worldly beauty. In this light, Christ or Job is an image of "the just man who is despised, beaten, buffeted on the face, crucified, forsaken by the gods" (NB 374). Far from being held in admiration, Christ was "ridiculed like those madmen who take themselves for kings; then he perished like a common criminal" (ICAG 138).

Antigone is also an example of the self-emptying character of love. The love of

Diogenes. Diogenes, who seems to have designated himself as a 'furious Socrates,' used to go wandering with only his cloak and knapsack, bereft of hearth and home." See Pierre Hadot ed. Arnold Davidson and trans. Michael Chase *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) 161.

³⁶See Plato's *Republic* Book 2, 360e. The just person in Plato's *Republic* is not he or she who is readily recognized as such. Visible displays of justice and goodness may, in fact, be obstacles to true justice and goodness. Thus, in the afterlife, Plato suggests, the souls will be judged in nakedness.

Antigone for the dead (her brother) is an excessive and disruptive love which is a threat to the social order. She willingly becomes a public outcast and disgrace out of love for her dead brother. "Antigone is a perfectly pure being, perfectly innocent, perfectly heroic, who voluntarily gives herself up to death to preserve a guilty brother from an unhappy fate in the other world. At the moment when imminent death approaches her nature betrays her, she feels herself abandoned by men and the gods. She perishes for having loved beyond reason" (ICAG 10). This self-sacrificing, excessive and mad love influences Weil's reading of the story of Antigone. Antigone, too, is an image of the despised just person, an intimation of the cross of Christ among the Greeks.

For Simone Weil, then, God's hidden love is most fully disclosed in locations of suffering and conflict. There is a "plenitude of God's presence in what seems absence, void, silence" (SNLG 90). In order to detect God's presence in void, however, we must first destroy the idols which obscure God's hiddenness. "Our effort has been the means of destroying part of the false plenitude which exists in us; and the divine emptiness, fuller than any plenitude, has come to dwell in us" (NB 531). One example of an idol of false plenitude which obscures attention to the hidden God is the worship of the glory and power of Christ by society and culture. Society as the 'Great Beast' (Plato) disregards the humiliated beggar in Christ and adores a mighty god instead.³⁷ "After the Resurrection the infamous character of his ordeal was effaced by glory, and today, across twenty centuries of adoration, the degradation which is the very essence of the Passion

³⁷Kierkegaard charges Christendom with the same idolatry, namely, the worship of the glorified and powerful Christ and neglect of the *Deus Incognito*. See *Practice in Christianity* edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) 24-25, 35-36, 107 and elsewhere.

is hardly felt by us...We no longer imagine the dying Christ as a common criminal...Today the glorious Christ veils from us the Christ who was made a malediction; and thus we are in danger of adoring in his name the appearance, and not the reality, of justice" (ICAG 142-43). The depiction of God as a glorious king leads us away from contact with the Christ who was made a malediction for humanity. The reality of justice is obscured by the appearance of justice.

The belief in miracles, for Weil, are part of the problem. They presuppose a God of visible power, strength and wondrous deeds; God is expected in dramatic displays of supernatural power. The kingly Messiah is adored in lieu of the suffering, hidden Messiah. Concomitant to the concealment of God's hiddenness, a miracle "compels one to turn a blind eye on the amount and nature of the evil existing in the world" (LTP 56). Weil claims that trust and faith in miracles leads one to believe that God's power is to be adored instead of the powerlessness of God in fragile human form. The result of such a faith is a disregard of the presence of God in the midst of evil and affliction, in the faces of those who suffer innocently. Worst yet, the exclusive worship of the mighty God remains unintelligible and distant from the harsh affliction of those await God's miraculous intervention without ever seeing it come to fruition. Attention to God's hiddenness is attention to affliction. The 'Great Beast' of society and the belief in miracles hide God's absence from us (NB 379).

Simone Weil maintains, moreover, that those who themselves participate in the cross of Christ are most able to recognize God's presence in hiddenness. Aeschylus expresses this well by suggesting that 'wisdom is born of suffering' (ICAG 57;NB 439).

For Weil this means that "the Cross is the only gateway to knowledge" (NB 444). Thus, those who have the harsh privilege of knowing suffering are in the best position to recognize God's hiddenness.³⁸ One example of this, Weil says, is African-American slaves. "To accept God as a common convict, shamefully tortured and put to death, is truly to overcome the world...but who thinks of Christ today as a common convict..? People worship the historic grandeur of the Church. The black slaves overcame the world by faith in Christ: 'They crucified my Lord'" (FLNB 144-45). The interpretation of Christianity by the slave narratives, songs, and laments, Weil intimates, is more profound and accurate than the readings of Scripture by cultural elites, including the scholars.

Weil contends that the figure of the fool in Shakespeare is also a brilliant attempt to convey the wisdom implicit in all the ostracized and subjugated groups of humanity. The fools of Shakespeare reveal a wisdom that is inaccessible to pure intellectual prowess. They speak the truth of the human condition in a way that is overlooked and repressed by others. "There is a class of people in this world who have fallen into the lowest degree of humiliation, far below beggary, and who are deprived not only of all social consideration but also, in everybody's opinion, of the specific human dignity, reason itself--and these are the only people who, in fact, are able to tell the truth...And not satirically or humorously true, but simply the truth. Pure unadulterated truth--luminous,

³⁸Wittgenstein shares Weil's sense of the wisdom inherent in suffering and life experience. Wittgenstein insists that intellectual arguments or proofs will do little to convince a person of the significance of God. Instead, life can "educate one to a belief in God. And *experiences* too are what bring this about; but I don't mean visions and other forms of sense experience which show us the 'existence of this being', but, e.g., sufferings of various sorts...Experiences, thoughts,--life can force this concept on us." See Culture and Value translated by Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 86e. We would do well to note that the same skepticism Weil demonstrates toward special visions or supernatural communications is shared by Wittgenstein.

profound, essential" (SL 200).³⁹ In a similar way, the village idiot expressed the truth by dwelling in a subjugated, humiliating state (MA 67,70).

The insight into the human condition conveyed by such slaves or fools is actual cognitive truth. It is not simply the case that their experiences are ethically inspiring. They are able to pierce the truth of reality in a way ignored by the powerful and wealthy. Indeed, in the Christian Scriptures it is the blind, lame, poor, and marginal who recognize the truth of Christ. Thus, St. Paul exclaims that God chooses what is foolish in the world to shame the wise (ICorinthians 1:26-31). What is this truth or wisdom that the outcasts of society potentially bear?

In addition to the awareness of the presence of force, violence, and suffering in human life, Martin Luther suggests that an aspect of this truth (wisdom born of suffering) is the recognition that we are all beggars.⁴⁰ Weil explains this as the awareness of human fragility, finitude, transience. "Man must learn to think of himself as a limited and dependent being, suffering alone can teach him this" (ICAG 57). Suffering brings the recognition of human misery and of the precious character of life (NB 236;NFR 169). Suffering forcefully deconstructs the illusion of autonomy, of the belief that we are

³⁹I would argue, as Weil does, that this availability of truth beyond the elite and privileged groups of society is central to origins of the Christian tradition. All the Gospels speak from the vantagepoint of the poor, excluded, and marginalized peoples. As is well known, one of the major attractions of Christianity to Weil was the fact that Christianity was, before anything else, a religion of slaves (WFG 67). It is this character of Christianity which Nietzsche repudiated.

⁴⁰Luther's statement "We are all beggars" was written two days before his death. It is preceded by the following words: "No one can understand Virgil in his Bucolics and Georgics unless he has spent five years as a shepherd or farmer. No one understands Cicero in his letters unless he has served under an outstanding government for twenty years. No one should believe that he has tasted the Holy Scriptures sufficiently unless he has spent one hundred years leading churches with the prophets." Besides wanting to convey the inexhaustible richness of Scripture, Luther insists that true wisdom is born of doing not speculating. See Heiko Oberman's biography Luther: Man between God and the Devil, op.cit., 166.

complete masters of our life. It makes evident our vulnerability to forces and events beyond our control. For Weil, this recognition is a bearing of the cross (leading towards decreation). "When everything is going more or less well, we do not think about this almost infinite fragility" (SNLG 185).⁴¹ "Unless constrained by experience, it is impossible to believe that everything in the soul--all its thoughts and feelings, its every attitude towards ideas, people, and the universe, and, above all, the most intimate attitude of the being towards itself--that all this is entirely at the mercy of circumstances" (SNLG 187). Attention to the presence of affliction in human life--that is, recognition of the hidden God--is central to the wisdom born of suffering.

The theology of the cross (hiddenness of God 1) in Simone Weil, therefore, inspires an attentiveness to God's hidden presence which the adoration of power, wealth and worldly beauty veils. It seeks to inspire a solidarity with the victims and dispossessed of history as a prerequisite for contact with the crucified Christ. The marginalized and oppressed people of history and society are those in the best positions to detect this hidden God. For Simone Weil, society and church too often worship a different god.

What if, however, the suffering is so oppressive and destructive that, far from a wisdom, what is engendered is the death of the possibility of truth, love, wisdom, God-consciousness. This brings me to a tragic consideration of the hiddenness of God 2 and

⁴¹In chapter three we have seen that John of the Cross phrases this insight in a very similar manner. During the 'dark night' the soul comes to recognize its own "lowliness and misery, which was not apparent in the time of its prosperity." See *The Dark Night* Book 1, Chapter 12, in *John of the Cross: Selected Writings* trans. Kieran Kavanaugh (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 189. It is crucial to note that for both John and Simone this recognition does not simply translate into a knowledge of one's sinfulness.

the mystery of evil in the thought of Simone Weil.

The Hiddenness of God 2

No doubt, there are experiences of affliction in history, society and nature which one cannot help but name evil. Far from ennobling, such suffering and violence often pulverizes whatever is in its path. Simone Weil's interpretation of the hiddenness of God 2 should be seen in light of the destructive presence of force in human life. The domination of violence in social oppression, war and conquest often irreparably damages its victims. Tragic experiences of violence and suffering arouses responses of lament and protest. Even the hidden God revealed in Jesus Christ is altered by the anguish and pain of his destiny. In the intense moment of Christ's cry of abandonment on the cross, the understanding of hiddenness 1 gives way to the more troubling question of hiddenness 2.⁴² With her broad awareness of the destructive presence of force in human life, Weil's reading of the hiddenness of God cannot be reduced to either the issue of predestination with Luther or Calvin, on the one hand, nor to the personal feeling of anxiety and estrangement among the modern existentialists, on the other. For Simone Weil (and the

⁴²Weil's struggle with hiddenness of God is certainly also inspired by the example of Christ at the cross. The cry of abandonment of Christ is an intense moment of crisis in which hiddenness 1 leads to a struggle with hiddenness 2. In Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* trans. Henry and Olga Carlisle (New York: Penguin Books, 1969) one of his characters tells us his impression of seeing a painting of the dead Christ (perhaps based on Hans Holbein's *The Dead Christ*). "There was no beauty; it it was a faithful representation of the corpse of a man who has borne infinite agony even before crucifixion, who has been wounded, tortured, beaten by guards, beaten by the people when he carried the cross and fell beneath its weight, and who, finally, has suffered the agony of crucifixion, lasting for six hours" (p.427). He then goes on to describe the tragic vision of impersonal force that this picture provoked. "As one looks at that painting, one conceives of nature in the form of some huge, implacable, dumb beast, or to be more exact, to be much more exact, though it may seem strange, in the form of some huge machine of the latest design which, deaf and unfeeling, has senselessly seized, crushed, and swallowed up a great and priceless Being...That picture expresses the notion of a dark, insolent, and stupidly eternal force to which everything is subject..." (p.428).

liberation theologians) the hiddenness of God is most powerfully apparent in the faces of whole groups and histories of marginalized and oppressed peoples. David Tracy eloquently interprets the hiddenness of God along these lines. He insists that the hidden God is revealed in "cross and negativity, above all in the suffering of all those others whom the grand narrative of modernity has too often set aside as non-peoples, non-events, non-memories, in a word, non-history."⁴³

In her life and thought Weil expresses an extraordinary sensitivity to the afflicted of history and society. "Let us suppose a man whose entire family has perished amidst tortures, and who himself was long exposed to torture in a concentration camp; or an American Indian of the sixteenth century who was the sole survivor of the massacre of his people...I myself have not gone through such things. But I know they exist..." (NB 432). Confronting the harsh existence of evil is a central mandate in the prophetic-tragic vision of Simone Weil. Greek tragedy, the vision of Job and the cry of Jesus on the cross permeate her thought on the issue of evil. As with Job, Weil complains of the violence on the earth and God's apparent indifference. In Job's words: "Why are times not kept by the Almighty, and why do those who know him never see their days? The wicked remove landmarks; they seize flocks and pasture them. They drive away the donkey of the orphan; they take the widow's ox for a pledge. They thrust the needy off the road; the poor of the earth all hide themselves...They lie all night naked, without clothing, and have no covering in the cold...From the city the dying groan, and the throat of the

⁴³See Tracy's essay "The Hidden God: The Divine Other of Liberation" in the journal Cross Currents (Spring 1996).

wounded cries for help; yet God pays no attention to their prayer" (Job 24:1-12). Faced with this void, abyss and chaos of affliction Weil turns to consider the hiddenness of God.

As mentioned, the void and chaos of affliction is most apparent through the destructive presence of force in history and nature. War and conquest make evident in an obvious and blatant manner the impact of violence in human affairs. In chapter two we considered the destructive impact of force in the form of social oppression, especially exploitive work. In the present context, we need to consider force in relation to war and conquest as one face of the hiddenness of God in history. One of Weil's major disputes with Marx, as we saw in chapter two, is that he underestimates the destructive and pacifying character of oppression. Affliction engenders submission not revolt, maintains Weil. This is, to be sure, also the case in regards to war and conquest which she insists Marx never fully faces (OL 65-69, 151-55).

The greatness of the Greeks, Weil claims, should be seen in light of their genius to illuminate the destructive presence of force in human life, as in war, and yet to despise it (ICAG 116). Their tragic vision is a lucid construal of the terror of history, of the harsh realities of suffering and violence. Greek tragedy, and Homer in particular, shows how force turns all subject to it into a 'thing' (MA 163). In Simone's essay on the *Iliad*, she cogently makes evident that force destroys all roots of memory as well as the inclination to rebel. "Curses, feelings of rebellion, comparisons, reflections on the future and the past, are obliterated from the mind of the captive; and memory itself barely lingers on" (MA 169). As in the 'Dark Night' of John of the Cross, memory is lost and

emptied when confronted with affliction.⁴⁴

In *The Need For Roots* Weil interprets this loss of memory at the hands of force in relation to concrete instances of historical violence such as conquest.⁴⁵ Human communities and traditions are uprooted and destroyed when violence seizes their lives and identities. "Uprootedness occurs whenever there is a military conquest...It reaches its most acute stage when there are deportations on a massive scale, as in Europe under the German occupation, or along the upper loop of the Niger, or where there is any brutal suppression of all local traditions..." (NFR 42). Far from proving ennobling of such countries or traditions, conquest brings a destruction from which the conquered may never recover (NFR 152). "For several centuries now, men of the white race have everywhere destroyed the past, stupidly, blindly, both at home and abroad...The past once destroyed never returns. The destruction of the past is perhaps the greatest of all crimes...We must put an end to the terrible uprootedness which European colonial methods always produce, even under their least cruel aspects" (NFR 49).⁴⁶

In her lifetime, Weil directed her attention against many instances of colonization in the modern world. She was tireless in reproaching the French government and people

⁴⁴See John of Cross, The Dark Night, Book 2, Chapter 3, op.cit., 199.

⁴⁵In addition to the uprootedness which conquest causes, economic domination could have the same effect, Weil argues. "Even without a military conquest, money-power and economic domination can so impose a foreign influence as actually to provoke this disease of uprootedness" (NFR 42).

⁴⁶For Weil, "nothing is more cruel to the past than the common place which asserts that spiritual values cannot be destroyed by force..." (SE 43). In western history, Rome, in particular, is an example of a colonizing country for Weil. "Rome, like every colonizing country, had morally and spiritually uprooted the conquered countries. Such is always the effect of a colonial conquest" (LTP 83).

for their cruelty and indifference to the people of Algeria.⁴⁷ Weil harshly reproached Europeans for their oppression and exploitation of African people (NFR 77). On the issue of the colonization of the Americas, she showed a contempt for those who sought to justify or mitigate the offense in any way (NFR 268).⁴⁸ Prior to the beginning of World War 2 Simone Weil even dared to suggest that a world war, while certainly not desirable, may prove to be punishment for the cruelty of modern European nations toward colonized peoples. "When I think of a possible war, I must admit that the dismay and horror such a prospect evokes in me is mingled with a rather comforting thought. It is that a European war can serve as the signal for the great revenge of the colonial peoples, which will punish our unconcern, our indifference, and our cruelty."⁴⁹

The issues of colonization and war in the modern world was, indeed, one major reason Weil repudiated so harshly the idea of progress. Any honest attention to the presence of violence and suffering in modernity belied, for Weil, any optimistic faith in reason and progress. "For those dreamers who considered that force, thanks to progress, would soon be a thing of the past, the *Iliad* could appear as an historical document; for others, whose powers of recognition are more acute and who perceive force, today as yesterday, at the very center of human history, the *Iliad* is the purest and the loveliest of

⁴⁷See Simone Petremont, Simone Weil: A Life translated by Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976) 319,325.

⁴⁸Weil was particularly upset at an article written in a Catholic review in New York on the anniversary of the 'discovery' of America by Columbus. The article apparently suggested that Columbus was sent to America in order to later in history give rise to a nation capable of defeating Hitler. In Weil's satirical words: "God, apparently, also despises colored races: the wholesale extermination of native American peoples in the sixteenth century seemed to him a small price to pay if it meant the salvation of Europeans in the twentieth..." (NFR 268).

⁴⁹See Simone Petremont's Simone Weil. op.cit., 297.

mirrors" (MA 163). There is a dark underside to the ostensible progress of the western modern world. The histories (or rather non-histories) of whole groups of oppressed and subjugated peoples challenge modernity's confident celebration in enlightenment and evolution. The presence of force and affliction is still a harsh reality in the modern world.

In the cases of war and conquest, Weil shows, force exercises a destructive influence upon all in its path. Affliction brands the human spirit with the mark of a slave and makes a 'thing' of the human person. Conquest uproots its victims and devastates their traditions, communities and even their hope in God. In light of this reality of violence and affliction, the question of evil cannot be avoided. To Simone Weil (and Job) it seems as if God is complicit in such affliction, if God is not the cause. Accusing God for the affliction of the world seems unavoidable in the face of evil. "Just as God, through the mouth of Christ, accused himself of the Passion, so we should accuse God for every human affliction" (FLNB 95).

Simone Weil notes the very important text in the book of *Job*. "This recalls an extraordinary passage in the Book of Job (16:19-21): 'Also now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high. My friends scorn me: but mine eye poureth out tears unto God. O that one might plead for a man with God, as a man pleadeth for his neighbor. O that God himself might be the arbiter between man and God...'" (ICAG 60;NB 525). Job call upon a mediator to act as a witness to and against God. Simone defends the protest of Job as a legitimate cry of anguish and sense of abandonment (SNLG 172). In the midst of affliction or through compassion for the affliction of others,

a struggle with God is not only valid but necessary for a more complete faith. Indeed, Weil reluctantly admits that there are times when the love of God is painfully difficult. "It is when I am in contact with the affliction of other people, those who are indifferent or unknown to me as much as the others, perhaps even more, including those of the most remote ages of antiquity. This contact causes me such atrocious pain and so utterly rends my soul that as a result the love of God becomes almost impossible for me for a while...I hope he will forgive me my compassion" (WFG 91). Indeed, Weil avers that compassion for others often appears to be at odds with love of God. "For in view of the host of terrible sufferings--and so often such undeserved ones--inflicted upon mankind, one might think that the love of one's neighbor leads to a rebellion against God" (NB 281). Weil insists that this is not blasphemy but a painful grappling with the issue of evil and God. It is a dark night of the soul.

Thus, Weil wants to make clear that a struggle with God can be a deeply religious act.⁵⁰ As with Prometheus struggling against Zeus or Jesus' cry of abandonment on the cross, the disobedience of Job is divine. "Is there a secret version in which, corresponding to human disobedience through lack of love, there is divine disobedience through excess of love?" (FLNB 344).

The struggle with and against God is nothing else than the struggle with the hiddenness of God 2. Central to the experience of affliction in history and nature, in the tragic vision of Simone Weil, is the insistence that evil and affliction often strike innocent

⁵⁰Elie Weisel in Souls on Fire: Portraits and Legends of Hasidic Masters (New York: Random House, 1972) explains that the life-long passion of the Hasidic master Levi-Yitzhak of Berdichev was realized through his continual struggle with God. "In this way", Weisel explains, "he wished to demonstrate that one may be Jewish with God, in God and even against God; but not without God" (p.109).

and undeserving victims in a haphazard manner. Affliction is not distributed according to a rational process of reward and punishment; affliction is not the result of sin.⁵¹ It is rare to encounter, Weil says, a depiction of suffering which does not reduce affliction to either sin or to the suggestion that affliction is a natural vocation of the afflicted (MA 193). When misfortune is seen in this way, then the afflicted become a "legitimate object of contempt...This is a view which makes cruelty permissible and indeed indispensable" (MA 193).

Margaret Farley claims that this kind of radical evil (i.e. conquest) cannot be understood within the traditional categories of redemption. "If the disease that crippled human life were only the guilt of sin, then the atoning death of the Christ would be a revelation of such love, mercy, and redemptive power that it would wipe away all the evil of history...The suffering that ravages the innocent, the young, and the persecuted is not relieved by atonement...Radical suffering is outside the bounds of justice and cannot be returned to the harmony of justice by consolation, vindication, or retribution. It cannot be *justified*."⁵² In contrast to the prophetic tradition (hiddenness 1), the tragic vision (hiddenness 2) maintains that radical evil is interruptive of all simple explanations. The Christian model of redemption is challenged. In the thought of Weil this gives rise to a sustained reflection on tragedy in relation to the passion of Christ. In contrast to some of the beliefs of the Jewish and Christian traditions, Greek tragedy depicts the cause of

⁵¹John of the Cross reproaches those spiritual advisors who associate all suffering with sin. He says that they are no different than Job's sorry comforters. See The Dark Night, Chapter 1, Book 12, op.cit., 189-91.

⁵²Margaret Farley, Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990) 63-64.

affliction to be the product of haphazard and chaotic force.

In this manner, Simone Weil explains that affliction often strikes as a blind mechanism. "A blind mechanism, heedless of degrees of spiritual perfection, continually buffets men hither and thither and flings some of them at the very foot of the Cross...Affliction is above all anonymous...It is indifferent, and it is the chill of this indifference--a metallic chill--which freezes all those it touches, down to the depth of their soul" (SNLG 175;NFR 232). Affliction is not a rational mechanism distributing punishment in a just fashion, nor is affliction the punishment by a personal God, for Weil. The influence of tragedy on her thought leads her to suggest that affliction is an inevitable aspect of a world in which chance and chaos are stubborn realities in perpetual struggle with order and beauty. In a more theological sense, Weil intimates that the indifferent face of necessity is an aspect of the impersonal, hidden face of God, the face of God which rains on the just and unjust alike. It is this impersonal providence of God that allows blind and indifferent necessity to have dominion (WFG 125; NB 542).⁵³

Weil's theory of creation is certainly beyond the scope of this chapter. In this context, however, it is important to note that the presence of indifferent necessity and force in creation is the result of God's self-sacrificial act. In creation, God renounced God's omnipotence in order to allow creation to be truly autonomous and other from

⁵³The impersonal face of God is not merely read by Weil in terms of the power of God and inscrutable presence of evil in history and nature, however. The impartiality of God (the sun) is also the basis for a Divine love that refuses to make preferences between friend and enemy. It is the basis of *agape*. Along these lines, Weil mentions the text of Matthew (NB 106; FLNB 129).

God.⁵⁴ Thus the powerless God is not only revealed at the cross, for Weil, but also in the very act of creation. As an act of love, creation is the limitation of God's power (NB 541). Creation is, therefore, an act of God in which the possibility for chaos and evil exists (NB 191-93,213; FLNB 100,120,164; GG 97-98).

This understanding of creation does not act as an explanation for the existence of evil, however. Why did God *have* to allow chaos and evil to thrive? There is no solution to this question. Weil does not conclude that evil exists because creation must involve freedom, for example. For Weil, the unruly presence of force and evil in creation resists any conclusive explanations. While we must attempt to understand the causes of suffering, especially to ascertain human guilt and responsibility, the why of suffering is pure mystery (SNLG 196). In her view, explanations for the 'why' often mask a quest for false consolation and a disregard for innocent sufferers.

Theodicies, in this light, are often imaginary attempts which avert our gaze from attention to affliction and contact with the hidden God. In this manner, Job's friends avert their gaze from affliction by their confident and imaginary explanations for suffering (NB 287). Thought is so revolted by affliction that it takes refuge in lies (SNLG 188). Weil is, indeed, quite suspicious of all language on the question of evil (and the mystery of God!). More than not, attempts to understand evil in the form of argument lead to theoretical solutions and rational explanations which inevitably reduce the mystery to idols of language and thought. "As a rule our imagination puts words into sounds in the

⁵⁴While there is no evidence that Weil read the Lurianic Kabbalah, this text expresses a similar vision of the Divine act of creation.

same way as we idly play at making out shapes in ruffled linen or in smoke wreaths. But when we are too exhausted...then we must have real words...All we get is silence" (NB 627). We yearn for explanations and solutions, but we only hear silence.⁵⁵ In Weil's view, this silence echoes the Father's (non)reply to Christ. "God allowed God to send up a cry to him and did not answer. It is when from the innermost depths of our being we need a sound which does mean something--when we cry out for an answer and it is not granted us--it is then that we touch the silence of God" (NB 627). The ability to hear the silence of God and to resist consoling theodicies is to participate in the cross. By attention to misery and affliction we ascend to God. "The attentive contemplation of misery, without compensation or consolation, drives us on into the supernatural..." (NB 287).

Suffering, thus, is completely resistant to theory and abstract speculation. It interrupts and deconstructs all rational thought. "The thought of suffering is not of the discursive kind. The mind comes slap up against physical suffering, affliction, like a fly against a pane of glass, without being able to make the slightest progress or discover anything new, and yet unable to prevent itself from returning to the attack" (NB 483;FLNB 292). The idols of thought (theodicies) continue returning to 'the attack'. When it is understood that theoretical solutions are impossible, then suffering becomes a koan to the mind. The only way of making progress is through contemplation, but a contemplation without a why. "To contemplate what cannot be contemplated (the

⁵⁵Nietzsche's interpretation of Greek tragedy is not altogether different from Weil's in another respect: Nietzsche insists that modern theory, including historical criticism, is an attempt to avoid confronting the dark and evil face of existence. Greek myth and poetry is at complete odds with abstract modern man. See The Birth of Tragedy, op.cit., 135-37.

affliction of another), without running away...that is what is beautiful" (FLNB 71). When we are able to remain silent, then the possibility of hearing the silence of God emerges. "Our soul is constantly clamorous with noise, but there is one point in it which is silence, and which we never hear...For, if he remains constant, what he will discover buried deep under the sound of his own lamentations is the pearl of the silence of God" (SNLG 197-98).

The refusal to explain the mystery of evil equally pertains to the conflict within God that I have been discussing. While Weil certainly may have been tempted by a Manichaean solution of two gods to the problem of evil, she explicitly rejects that temptation.⁵⁶ A simple positing of an evil, creator God as the cause of affliction is, no less than some theodicies, a debasing of the mystery of suffering. This reduction of the mystery to a confident separation of good and evil gods is the mistake of Manichaenism, Weil claims. "As regards the question of good and evil, one may perhaps reproach the Manichaeans with having diminished the impenetrability of the mystery of evil by their manner of enunciating it" (NB 352). Any confident rational solution is to be shunned for Weil. A struggle with and against God does not lead to the positing of two gods in Weil anymore than the struggle with God does for Job.

As we have seen, then, the hiddenness of God 2 in Simone Weil is an honest

⁵⁶ Augustine among others was equally attracted to the Manichaeans for their explanation of the origin of evil. Of course, later he becomes unsatisfied with the explanations of the Manichaeans. In general Weil's sensitivity towards suffering and chaos in history and nature is shared by Augustine. In *The City of God* tran. H. Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 1972) he points to the horrible injustices of history and society. Countless innocent persons are accused of crimes by the Empire and unjustly tortured and put to death (p.859). Rome imposes its yoke of domination over conquered peoples by blood and war (p.861). Life is beset by suffering, misery, and illnesses (p.855). In light of such suffering, it is shameful, he says, that the 'apatheia' of some philosophers prevents them from being moved to tears. In this sense 'apatheia' is a "moral defect of insensitivity" (p.565).

attempt to confront the devastating presence of violence and oppression in history and nature. In a haphazard and indiscriminate manner force strikes whole communities and histories of innocent persons (or non-persons). Theodicies become idols when force and suffering is reduced to the punishment of sin and the chaotic rule of force is neglected. By attention to such unjust force in history and nature, Weil confronts the hiddenness of God and God's seeming complicity in the face of destructive violence. As Job exclaims, "If not he, then who else?" (*Job* 9:24). God as Power is seen to be, if not the cause, at least complicit in the affliction of human beings. God appears to be impersonal and indifferent to human well-being; the hidden God works life and death in the righteous and wicked alike. As Job and Prometheus challenge God, so too Weil struggles with the Almighty. Finally, however, the presence of evil is resistant to all explanations, including the simple and outright repudiation of God. As the following section will show, Simone Weil contends that the fundamental meaning of God must be seen vis-a-vis love and powerlessness at the cross not omnipotence. The possibility of reconciliation between the redemption of sin (prophetic tradition) and the existence of radical evil (tragedy) is possible through the death of God at the cross.

Reconciliation of the Hiddenness 1 and 2: The Prophetic-Tragic Thought of Simone Weil

"Thus do the gods justify the life of man: they themselves live it--the only satisfactory theodicy!"⁵⁷ Simone Weil would agree with this quote of Nietzsche; indeed, the only satisfactory theodicy is through a divine solidarity with the affliction of the

⁵⁷From *The Birth of Tragedy*, op.cit., 43.

world. "The Cross of Christ is the only source of light that is bright enough to illumine affliction" (SNLG 194). This does not suggest that the mystery of evil has a theoretical solution, even in the form of the cross of Christ. The cross of Christ is, rather, a divine response to evil and the model for our response to the presence of affliction. It is a response which is marked by a solidarity without a why for suffering. It remains silent.

The possibility of a reconciliation between the hiddenness of God 1 and 2 in Weil proposes that the cross of Christ is not merely a redemption of sin, but includes as its central meaning the embrace of affliction and the transformation of radical evil. Thus, in Weil's view, the passion of Christ cannot be reduced to a consequence of the Fall. "Thus it is true to say that the Incarnation and the Passion are and are not consequences of Adam's disobedience" (NB 236). Human misery, she claims in this context, is misunderstood if reduced simply to a matter of sin. The suffering of God at the cross is more than a response to a moralizing reading of the Fall. Instead, it is a response to the question of evil by God living it.

For Weil, the reconciliation of the prophetic and tragic vision occurs with the struggle of Christ at the cross. Contrary to the martyrs, Jesus approaches his death with fear and trembling. He is shaken and disturbed by the prospect of affliction. "The accounts of the Passion show that a divine spirit, incarnate, is changed by misfortune, trembles before suffering and death, feels itself, in the depths of its agony, to be cut off from man and God" (MA 192). Christ did not die as a martyr; he died as a common criminal (WFG 125;NB 26). Thus, the most supernatural aspect of Christ's life, Weil avers, is not to be found in the power and glory of Christ. "The supernatural part is the

sweat of blood, the unsatisfied longing for human consolation, the supplication that he might be spared, the sense of being abandoned by God...'My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?' There we have the real proof that Christianity is something divine" (NB 263;GG 79). Affliction compelled Christ to cry out against God. As with Job, affliction thrusts Christ into a dark night of desperation and anguish. Affliction causes God to be absent.

In this light, the affliction of Christ is more than a redemption of the sin of humanity; it is a tragic event. The affliction Jesus endures brings a sense of loss, abandonment and lamentable suffering to the spirit and body of Jesus. The torment of Christ is distorted when the glory and power of God in Christ is interpreted as immunizing Christ from affliction. In the event approaching his death (Garden of Gethemene) and at the cross, Christ is stripped of glory and power. Indeed, the Gospels portray a human-divine figure who is not in control of his own destiny. He too is subject to the limitations, fragility and dependency of human nature. Unlike the figure of Socrates, Christ reveals a tragic vulnerability.⁵⁸

In addition to this fragility, Simone Weil reads a tragic element in the actual destiny of Christ. Christ is not a master of his own will. He empties himself of his will

⁵⁸The contrast between the deaths of Christ and Socrates is well-known. Socrates is far less troubled and is relatively tranquil and serene about his imminent death. Margaret Farley in Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion, op.cit., quotes the reading of Socrates' heroic death by Levinas. Contrary to the suffering of Socrates, Levinas says, "we know that the possibilities of tyranny are much more extensive....It can exterminate in the tyrannized soul even the very capacity to be struck...To have a servile soul is to be incapable of being jarred, incapable of being ordered" (p.55). Even Nietzsche contrasts the tragic vision with the theoretical and scientific vision of Socrates. With regards to the death of Socrates, the optimistic character of theoretical man is unveiled. "Hence the image of the dying Socrates, as the human being whom knowledge and reasons have liberated from the fear of death..." (The Birth of Tragedy, op.cit., 96-97). Knowledge has liberated Socrates, Nietzsche contends, from a tragic struggle with death.

in order to make room for the will of God (decreation for Weil). "The mystery of the Cross of Christ lies in a contradiction, for it is at the same time an offering freely consented to and a punishment undergone entirely against his will...Those who only conceive the crucifixion under the aspect of an offering take away from it its salutary mystery and its salutary bitterness. To desire martyrdom is to desire far too little. The Cross is something infinitely greater than martyrdom" (NB 415). The bitterness of Christ's destiny should not, then, be mitigated by an appeal to the divine freedom of God incarnate. Christ endures his destined affliction in the form of dependent and vulnerable human nature. The practical implication of this view is that affliction is not something one seeks, contends Weil. When it comes to one, it is often beyond the control of the autonomous agent.

In the case of Christ, then, the cross comes against his will (fate) and, yet, with consent the freedom of Christ is exercised (destiny).⁵⁹ Weil believes that this tragic tension between freedom and fate is central to the Gospels. In particular, she mentions that the gospel of John emphasizes the freedom and authority of Christ, while the synoptic gospels accent the powerless and humble character of Christ's life. Between the consent on the part of Christ, Weil says, "and his lamentations and protests there is the same connection as between the Gospel according to St. John and the Synoptic Gospels" (NB 538). This has been traditionally seen in terms of a tension between a low and high christology. Weil intimates that this tension may also be seen in relation to a tragic

⁵⁹In Hegel's reading of Greek tragedy he draws attention to the tension between determinism and freedom. When the hero exercises his or her freedom, a fatalistic understanding of fate is transformed into a necessity that is the individual's destiny. See *Hegel: On Tragedy* eds. Anne Paolucci and Henry Paolucci (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) 325. Also see Louis Ruprecht, *Tragic Posture and Tragic Vision*, op.cit., chapter 2.

vision.

In Weil's reading of the passion narratives, the fusion of a prophetic sense of the redemption of sin with a tragic vision of the brutal force of affliction is accomplished. To a large degree, the latter sensibility dominates in Weil, even if the former is clearly not absent. By incorporating the prophetic vision in her thought Weil avoids the mistake of absolving human beings of responsibility and guilt for much human suffering. While her tragic sensibility does indeed highlight the impersonal rule of force and necessity in human history and nature, she also does not hesitate to speak of awareness of human sin in a way the prophets would remind us. An important characteristic of sin, for example, is the consent and obedience to force, on the one hand, and related to this, the refusal to recognize the fragile and limited character of human life, on the other (GG 43). Obedience to force, lust for power distorts a true self-understanding of our human nature. Feelings of invulnerability and omnipotence pervert our humanity and prohibit compassion for the weak and oppressed. Acceptance of human fragility and ethical attention to our neighbor lays the foundation for decreation and compassion in Simone Weil. The pride that clings to our own ego is the sinful obstacle to decreation and compassion.

The passion narratives disclose a God, thus, who illuminates both hiddenness 1 and 2. This God is disclosed in a hiddenness which reveals God's presence in suffering and conflict, on the one hand, and a hiddenness which confronts God's absence vis-a-vis the brutal and destructive impact of force in history and nature, on the other. In the lamentations and trembles of Jesus, the mystery of evil is confronted with a loving

passion which defies and silences theoretical solutions. It is this powerless God who is the only model for Christians to imitate. "Obviously, we can only see with our eyes and can only imitate God-in-his-powerlessness, and not God-in-his-power" (NB 542).⁶⁰

The imitation of God-in-his-powerlessness is love and justice. In the loving, decreative act of Christ on the cross the separation between God and God is reconciled. "God is so essentially love that the unity, which in a sense is his actual definition, is a pure effect of love. And corresponding to the infinite virtue of unification belonging to this love there is the infinite separation over which it triumphs, which is the whole creation spread throughout the totality of space and time, consisting of mechanically brutal matter and interposed between Christ and his Father" (SNLG 177). God is separated from God where chaotic force gives rise to affliction. Wherever and whenever in history and nature this occurs, God is estranged from God's self. We participate in the separation of God from God in every act of suffering. Yet, in Christ's loving perseverance at the cross, we are given a hint of God's reconciling love which triumphs over estrangement and alienation.

The prophetic-tragic vision of Weil ends hopeful. As she insists, a Christian reflection on affliction is not a "morbid preoccupation with suffering and grief" (SNLG 192). The cross of Christ is the path to an insight and awareness of the presence of evil in history and nature. When this awareness is joined with a loving attention to the affliction of others (*agape*), participation in the cross becomes the location of God's

⁶⁰Luther makes a very similar point that God manifested in the powerless figure of Christ is the only model for faith, not God-in-his-power. See his Bondage of the Will, Chapter 10, in Martin Luther, op.cit., 190-91.

reconciliation with humanity and with God's very self. In order for this to be possible, the mystery of evil must be posed as insoluble and rational explanations eschewed. The example of God disclosed in Christ is the inspiration for a response to evil which loves and is just without a why.

Justice and Love without a Why: Ethics and the Tragic Vision

Justice and love must always mutually inform and contribute to each other, maintains Weil. Without justice, love is in danger of becoming a sentimental and romantic attachment. Justice is a praxis of detachment which purifies the human spirit of ego-centric motives, desires and the self-serving will in general. Detachment or decreation makes possible an attentive contemplation of an Other--whether that Other be a person, text, event, myth, symbol, etc.. On the other hand, love performs a crucial function in transforming justice into pure gift. Without love, justice is too easily debased into revenge or simply into an economic notion of exchange (*quid pro quo*). In the case of war, for example, Weil shows how the appeal to justice is often a cloak to justify the slaughter of the enemy (MA 220,182). "All talk of chastisement, punishment, retribution or punitive justice nowadays always refers solely to the basest kind of revenge" (MA 75).

For Simone Weil attention to the poor and afflicted has justice and love at its center. "Because affliction and truth need the same kind of attention before they can be heard, the spirit of justice and the spirit of truth are one...The name of this intense, pure, disinterested, gratuitous attention is love" (MA 72). Justice and love in Simone Weil is based on the major premise of her tragic vision (hiddenness 2); namely, that every human

person is vulnerable to the unpredictable and chaotic play of force. The greatness of the *Iliad*, she argues, is that no person is set either above or below the common human condition (MA 188). The author of this epic was able to portray the bitterness of human affairs in a way that fairly depicts the equality of every human being, whether Greek or Trojan, friend or foe. "It is in this that the *Iliad* is absolutely unique, in this bitterness that proceeds from tenderness and that spreads over the whole human race, impartial as sunlight" (MA 188).

The horrible impact of power on human affairs is, in part, due to the obscuring of our common human nature. The victims of force are stripped of their human nature and dignity altogether. Their affliction produces feelings of self-contempt and worthlessness. Those who wield force, on the other hand, are intoxicated by power and lose their humanity by their feeling of invulnerability and greatness. Neither the weak nor the strong recognize their shared humanity. "They have in common a refusal to believe that they both belong to the same species: the weak see no relation between themselves and the strong, and vice a versa" (MA 173). The victors and vanquished alike come to feel that their lot in life is inherent to their nature. For the vanquished and slaves, affliction is seen as either the natural vocation of the afflicted or as a result of sin. In the case of the victors and rulers, their power is likewise interpreted as inherent to their nature. A recognition of their vulnerability to external circumstances is precluded. In truth, however, power and affliction is allocated in an arbitrary and conventional fashion (chance)(MA 235). Power is based on prestige; a prestige that is legitimated by both the masters and the slaves.

Along with much of Greek tragedy, Weil insists that death is the greatest teacher regarding our (vulnerable) common humanity. Regardless of power, status, wealth, fame-death comes to all. Hades is the great equalizer (ICAG 9). The perfect justice and equality of Hades is, for Weil, a symbol of the justice and impartiality of God, who shines on all equally. Human justice and compassion is made possible by a recognition of the fragility and equality of human nature.

Only by admitting our vulnerability to chance and the chaotic play of circumstances is compassion for the afflicted possible. "He who does not realize to what extent shifting fortune and necessity hold in subjection every human spirit, cannot regard as fellow-creatures nor love as he loves himself those whom chance separated from him by an abyss" (MA 192). By facing our own susceptibility to suffering, we can begin compassionately to recognize the destructive impact of force in the lives of others. "Compassion is the recognition of one's own misery in another" (FLNB 209). Attention to human misery, thus, challenges the assumption that affliction is the result of sin or is a natural vocation of the afflicted. In order for love and justice to be possible, this kind of attention is indispensable.

This justice and love interrupts our own personal interests and preferences. Compassion makes possible an empathetic consideration of the suffering of others. An obstacle to compassion is the disregarding of human misery. "Owing to the fact that the whole soul has not managed to know and accept human misery, we think there must be a difference between human beings, and consequently we fail to be just, either by drawing a distinction between our advantage and that of other people, or else by marking a

preference for certain individuals from among other people" (NB 237).⁶¹

A recognition of the misery of human nature is the beginning of a way of life exemplified by spiritual nakedness, detachment, decreation. When the human person engages in a life of spiritual nakedness he renders himself vulnerable and capable of attention to the suffering of others. The natural preference for ourselves over others is annihilated. The will no longer acts out of self-regarding motives (i.e. pity, vanity, in conformity with social convention, for the sake of a good conscience, etc.) but out of a detached justice and love (SNLG 189). "There is nothing left in them which one could call their own will, their person, their 'I'" (SNLG 189). The gift of compassion and justice is most fully realized in this decreeted state.

In this condition, the praxis of justice and love are performed without a 'why'. The benefactor of Christ, when he meets an afflicted man, does not feel any distance between himself and the other. He projects all his own being into him. It follows that the impulse to give him food is as instinctive and immediate as it is for oneself to eat when one is hungry. And it is forgotten almost at once, just as one forgets yesterday's meals. Such a man would not think of saying that he takes care of the afflicted for the Lord's sake; it would seem as absurd to him as it would be to say that he eats for the Lord's sake. One eats because one can't help it...The supernatural process of charity...does not need to be completely conscious. Those whom Christ thanks reply: 'Lord when ...?' They did not know whom they were feeding (SNLG 190-92).⁶²

⁶¹This non-preferential understanding of justice and love does appear to challenge the 'preferential option for the poor' of the liberation theologians. I do not think this is the case in Simone Weil. The non-preferential justice of Weil is a critique of the natural preferences society and culture gives to the strong, powerful, wealthy, etc.. "Preference for some human being is necessarily a different thing from charity. Charity does not discriminate. If it is found more abundantly in any special quarter, it is because affliction has chanced to provide an occasion there for the exchange of compassion and gratitude" (WFG 200). In locations of great affliction, thus, a more special form of charity is entailed. A preferential option for the poor is necessary in conditions of great affliction and injustice.

⁶²Elsewhere Weil interprets the great judgement scene in Matthew 25:31-46 in the following way: "I was naked and ye clothed me'. This gift is simply an indication of the state of those who acted in this way. They were in a state which make it impossible for them not to feed the hungry and to clothe the naked; they did not in any way do it for Christ, they could not help doing it because the compassion of Christ was in them" (GG

The gift of justice and love dispenses with a 'why'. Just as there is no 'why' to evil, there is no 'why' to compassion for the afflicted. To seek explanations for the mystery of evil, in this manner, is harmful to charity. "And to try to find compensations, justifications for evil is as harmful for the cause of charity as it is to try to expound the content of the mysteries on the plane of the human intelligence" (NB 341).

The refusal to seek solutions to the problem of evil is, therefore, the basis for compassionate and just action in Simone Weil. Action is inspired by the silencing of explanatory 'whys'. When the question 'why' arises, our thought must turn in the direction of a practical concern to alleviate or, if possible, transform the affliction of others. "Why has it been allowed that he should go hungry? While one's thought is occupied by this question, one proceeds automatically to find bread for him" (FLNB 94). The loving and just praxis without a why is related, for Weil, to Christian *agape*. In the faces of unknown and strange Others, love makes its presence felt. "...the neighbor is a being of whom nothing is known, lying naked, bleeding, and unconscious on the road. It is a question of completely anonymous, and for that reason, completely universal love" (WFG 98).⁶³ The neighbor is the nameless person outside of my scope of interests. It is in the face of the afflicted neighbor that God's agapeic love is disclosed (WFG 150). At this sacred site the hiddenness of God is manifested.

Through love and justice the reconciliation between the hiddenness of God 1 and 2 is realized. The terror of the harsh rule of violence and force in history and nature

40).

⁶³Weil also insists that justice is a public ethic. It is in need of serious modification when it is privatized in the form of personal values such as 'niceness' or 'family values' (NFR 114.121.137).

(hiddenness 2) is transformed by gratuitous and self-sacrificing love and justice (hiddenness 1). The consent of Christ to continue to love even in the face of his affliction and abandonment heals the estrangement and conflict between humanity and humanity, humanity and God, God and God. Insofar as we are just and loving, we too partake in the cross of God and, consequently, the transforming reconciliation.

CHAPTER SIX

PROPHECY AND TRAGEDY IN THE THOUGHT OF GUTIERREZ: REFLECTIONS ON THE HIDDEN GOD

The thought of Gustavo Gutierrez is exemplary in its exposure of human responsibility and guilt for much suffering and evil in history. His prophetic vision disturbs and rouses the conscience of the modern person. As with the great Israelite prophets, his message is one of rebuke and denunciation in the face of injustice, exploitation, and oppression. Whether the part we play in the presence of such suffering is one of direct cause or of complicity and neutrality, there is no doubt, Gutierrez argues, that we are all responsible agents. The contribution of liberation theology is, in part, the single-minded attention to the ethical demands and responsibilities of the Christian life, especially in relation to the weakest and most forgotten of history and society. This prophetic vision in liberation theology has given birth to more than an ethical imperative concerning love of neighbor (*agape*). It has led to an embrace of social scientific methods which seek to illuminate and pin-point the causes and roots of suffering. In this manner, liberation theology is concerned with ascertaining and analyzing those agents (classes, groups, races, individuals, etc.) responsible for injustice and oppression. The

target of this kind of analysis is sin, both at personal and structural levels.

Without disregarding this element of liberation theology, it is the central contention of this chapter that there is a significant shift in the later work of Gustavo Gutierrez (from *A Theology of Liberation* to *On Job and Las Casas*). Without losing his prophetic passion and vision, Gutierrez turns to consider the more troubling and unsettling question of evil. Here the issue turns from an exclusive concentration on sin as the cause of suffering towards a reflection on the impersonal and mysterious reality of evil. Reflection on the relationship between the goodness and omnipotence of God and the reality of evil (theodicy) comes to the forefront of his theology. There emerges in his thought a reading of suffering and affliction that has affinities with tragedy in addition to prophecy. Struggle with the question of God and evil now occupies center stage in his reading of Scripture. He dares to suggest that theology must be willing to confront the question of God in a way that honestly and bravely faces the horrors of history and nature. "Human suffering, involvement with it, and the questions it raises about God are in fact one point of departure and one central theme in the theology of liberation. But the first concern in this context is not with the 'evil of guilt' but rather with the 'evil of misfortune', the evil suffered by the innocent" (OJ xv). A central theme of liberation theology, he contends, is innocent suffering and the implications of such a fact for our understanding of God. Gutierrez cogently presents us with a theological vision which heeds the cries, laments, and protests of the poor and afflicted. The question of God's absence or silence in the face of evil is an unavoidable issue in this theological understanding. The principal concern of this chapter is to investigate these issues in terms

of both prophecy and tragedy. A model such as the hiddenness of God may provide us with a helpful approach to these questions.¹

The Question of God and the Discipline of Religion

We cannot assume that the question of God is the same question posed by religious studies. The discipline of religious studies *per se* has its origins in the modern, Enlightenment world. In this context the task before modern thinkers was to isolate the core, universal characteristics of religion in human experience. The form that such a study of religion took was deeply indebted to philosophical reflection and, in the case of the classic figures of Kant, Hume, and Hegel, a reflection that was to be autonomous from theology.² As a theoretical form autonomous from theology, the philosophy of religion was engaged in isolation from concrete and particular religious traditions and practices. Religious studies adopted the methodology of Enlightenment reasoning and sought to provide religion with objective and certain foundations. Demand for objectivity and neutrality in religion were welcome approaches, to be sure, in the context of religious wars. We would be misguided to ignore the contributions of the modern study of religion. The ambiguity of this modern project, however, is more evident to us today.

¹David Tracy has influenced me much in his original reading of the hiddenness of God in relation to liberation theology. See "The Hidden God: The Divine Other of Liberation" in Cross Currents, Volume 46, Number 1 (Spring 1996) 5-16.

²See David Tracy, "On the Origins of Philosophy of Religion: The Need for a New Narrative of Its Founding" in Myth and Philosophy ed. Frank Reynolds and David Tracy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990). As an example, consider the following characterization of modern times by Edmund Husserl: "When, with the beginning of modern times, religious belief was becoming more and more externalized as a lifeless convention, men of intellect were lifted by a new belief, their great belief in an autonomous philosophy and science." See his Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology trans. Dorion Cairns (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishing, 1993) 4.

David Tracy has written that this modern project, however honorable and necessary, is equally responsible for the marginalization and subjugation of all forms of thought and human persons that do not conform to its own norms of rationality and humanity.³ The effect of such a consequence for theology has been the domestication of *theos* at the hands of the modern *logos*. The awesome and interrupting God can easily be muted and stifled by the modern project of religious studies. Tracy argues that some forms of postmodern thought may be welcome allies for theology in their unmasking of the pretensions and illusions inherent in modern logocentric thought. "But, at its best, postmodern theology is an honest if sometimes desperate attempt to let God as God be heard again; disrupting modern historical consciousness, unmasking the pretensions of modern rationality, demanding that attention be paid to all those others forgotten and marginalized by the modern project. *Theos* has returned to unsettle the dominance of the modern *logos*."⁴

In a similar manner, Johann Baptist Metz argues that while modernity says yes to religion, it says no to God.⁵ Metz contends that such a godlessness is deadly to theology. The horror of suffering, especially on the massive scale of the Holocaust, makes every objective and "noncontextual talk about God appear empty and blind."⁶ A detached

³See his provocative and creative essay "The Return of God in Contemporary Thought" in On Naming the Present: God, Hermeneutics, Church (New York: Orbis Books, 1994) pp.36-45.

⁴ibid, 37.

⁵See his essay "Suffering Unto God" in the journal Critical Inquiry Volume 20, Number 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) 611-622.

⁶ibid, 611.

neutrality can only appear apathetic in the face of affliction. When such an evasion of the question of evil is successful, the disturbing reality of God is safely avoided. But the consequence of such a move is evident: the idols of religion eclipse the face of the incomprehensible and hidden God. Risk and struggle are evaded and the question of theodicy is either ignored or rationalized. In the words of Metz: "So long as it is a matter of religion--in a very general and indeterminate sense--there is really no theodicy problem. Rather, religion serves in this case precisely to avoid or to obstruct this question....With God, however, risk and danger enter into, or return to, religion."⁷ The question of theodicy, Metz contends, is not how to provide a reasonable explanation for God in the face of suffering, but rather how can one speak of God at all in the face of the abysmal history of suffering. This latter question can only be approached when a willingness to risk and suffer inspires the theological task. An attentiveness and openness to the dissent, laments, and protests of the poor and oppressed is at the heart of this vision. Without seeking any consoling and absolute answers, theology must be willing to struggle with the question of evil and to allow the cry of Christ on the cross to be heard throughout history.⁸

Much of these above issues are central to the thought of Gustavo Gutierrez. How can we speak of God amidst the unjust suffering and oppression in the world? Gutierrez claims that this is the principal question of his liberation theology (OJ xiv). For

⁷ibid, 613.

⁸For a very interesting dissertation on the thought of Gustavo Gutierrez, J.B. Metz, and David Tracy on the question of God see Gaspar Martinez, "Catholic Post-Rahnerian Theology: Seeking God in History and Society," University of Chicago, August 1997.

Gutierrez, modern philosophies and theologies are too often preoccupied with providing apologetical arguments to non-believers to face the question of affliction (TSMYF 7, 23-24; OJ 16). If the question of affliction emerges at all in modern thought, more than likely it is in the form of personal anguish in the face of anxiety rather than affliction at communal and global levels. The willingness to disturb the complacency of modern thought on the question of God is at the heart of Gutierrez's project.⁹ He insists that the struggle with God may even be terrifying. "Some will feel genuine terror. And all of us will a disquiet, as we are deprived of our age-old securities" (PPH 22). This interruption of our confident securities leads us into unknown ground, into new horizons for speaking of God. When theology is able to take such a risk it will begin to heed the voices of those persons and groups whom it has frequently ignored and overlooked. With Job, it will begin to learn of a wisdom born of suffering and complaint. "That is why I cannot keep quiet: in my anguish of spirit I shall speak, in my bitterness of soul I shall complain" (Job 7:11). "Nor can the poor and oppressed of Latin America remain silent," remarks Gutierrez. "What the poor and oppressed have to say may sound harsh and unpleasant to some. It is possible that they may be scandalized at hearing a frank avowal of the human and religious experience of the poor...." (OJ 102). The words and laments

⁹While Gutierrez does not appropriate the term 'postmodernity', he does share the suspicion and critique of modern forms of thought. He wants to make evident, for example, the ways in which the ostensible progress and evolution of western European civilization has, at the same time, brought about the subjugation and colonization of entire groups and races of peoples. "It will no longer do simply to continue to think in the modern mold, refusing to accept the theological datum that that mold, that mentality, has accompanied and justified the historical process that creates this new world of spoliation and injustice" (PPH 231). Many of the ideas lauded by the Enlightenment (rationality, freedom, individuality, progress) are shown to be deeply ambiguous. In the case of freedom, for example, Gutierrez argues that liberal notions of freedom, while important for inspiring liberation and resistance, at the same time may be partners in oppression and exploitation. Laissez-faire capitalism, private property rights: in these cases, freedom is often an instrument of the powerful and wealthy to maintain their privileged status and position.

of the afflicted do, indeed, sound scandalous. What Gutierrez makes clear is that these voices and cries cannot be avoided in any form of theological thought which professes to be an heir of the Jewish and Christian traditions. "Withdrawal and evasion in the face of these questions," he writes, "can end in an acceptance of evil and injustice, and even resignation to it, which are in the final analysis contrary to faith in the God who liberates" (GL 155).

The issues raised by Tracy, Metz, and Gutierrez all speak of the need to reconsider the question of God. I would like to do so in relation to the issue of Divine absence or hiddenness in Gutierrez. It is important to mention the resources Gutierrez turns to for his reflections on the hidden God. First of all, the contemporary experience of global oppression and suffering is a key element in his theology of God's hiddenness. Gutierrez maintains that any theology must be attentive to the 'signs of the times'. Reflection on the question of God is always in the location of a particular historical context and the context of Gutierrez is of the 'third world' wherein poverty and premature death is a daily reality. History does not repeat itself. Theology must remain vigilant and attentive to the surprising and ever-changing configurations and experiences of history. Christian theology must be able to discern and locate Christ crucified in the faces of the persons (or non-persons) of one's time and place, he contends. The novelty of the situation of the Indies and the conquest of the New World, for example, warranted an unprecedented form of theological reflection, argues Gutierrez (LC 357). Las Casas was a genius in his ability to reread his Christian tradition in light of the novel historical situation of the sixteenth century.

In addition to the historical context of the 'third world', the ambiguity of human experience is another source of Gutierrez's theological position. It is not difficult to recognize that in human life there are fundamental experiences which are impossible to systematize and order. Joy and suffering; life and death; ecstasy and terror; love and hate; justice and injustice; beauty and ugliness; order and chaos; immutability and transience; necessity and contingency; good and evil: no doubt, all of these experiences are a recognizable part of human life.¹⁰ The theology of Gutierrez seeks to do justice to the complexity and ambivalence of human reality. Reflection on God can neglect neither the goodness and beauty of created being, nor the interruptive and troubling presence of evil.

Finally, and most importantly, the major source for Gutierrez's reflections on God is the Scriptures. I hope to demonstrate that a theology of the cross is a dominant and decisive presence in the thought of Gutierrez. In this light, God is manifested in locations of suffering, conflict, oppression, and estrangement--where God is hidden. The Word of God comes to interrupt and unsettle our confidences in reason, culture, power, nature, human anthropology, etc.. The Word is disclosed in powerlessness and poverty; revelation is foolishness to the ways of the world. What is of decisive importance, moreover, is that the Hebrew bible plays a crucial role in the theology of Gutierrez. We cannot overemphasize the importance of this aspect of Gutierrez's thought. His reflections on God are deeply shaped by his readings of the prophets, Exodus, the Psalms,

¹⁰See David Tracy, *Blessed Rage For Order* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988) for an excellent reading of common human experiences in terms of the concept of 'limit'. Tracy argues that human experiences can be read as 'limits-to' (e.g., finitude, contingency, transience) or as 'limits-of' (e.g., fundamental faith or trust in the worthwhileness of existence, our basic belief in order and value)(92-109).

Lamentations, and Job. The first element of the heritage of Israel is, in his view, an ethical vision which permeates the Hebrew bible. The prophetic condemnation of injustice, of oppression of the poor, of trusting in idols of foreign gods, or the idols of power and wealth: all express an ethics very significant to the liberation theology of Gutierrez. This is not the only issue inherent to the traditions of Israel, however.

In addition to the prophetic-ethical elements of the Hebrew bible, Gutierrez incorporates the laments and protests of the afflicted nation of Israel into his theology--the struggle with God's absence. To be sure, the history of Israel is a history of suffering, exile, and alienation. The classic texts of biblical Israel articulate not only joy, song, and trust in God, but also complaint, terror, and confusion. Where is God when the wicked are permitted to trample the poor into the dust of the earth? Why does God hide his face in the times of trouble and distress? Metz explains well the tragic beauty of this aspect of biblical Israel: "This language of prayer is itself a language of suffering, a language of crisis, a language of doubt and of radical danger, a language of complaint and accusation, a language of crying out and, quite literally, of the grumbling of the children of Israel."¹¹ As Metz and Gutierrez make clear, the problem of theodicy only emerges within this context of Israel's suffering and trust and faith in the good and omnipotent God. With Marcion, for example, the issue of theodicy disappears altogether when the God of the Old Testament is repudiated as an evil Demiurge. When this position is condemned as heretical by orthodox Christianity, we are left with another possibility which attempts to account for evil: human freedom. For Augustine (who was a

¹¹"Suffering Unto God", op.cit., 620-21.

Manichaeism for a while we must remember), the conversion to Christianity made the theodicy solution of both an evil and good God impossible. If we are not to find fault with God, then the fault must lie entirely with human nature. Human nature freely turned away from God and evil is the consequence of this original sin. Salvation, in this picture, is redemption of sin and guilt, then.¹² My major point, and that of Gutierrez and Metz, is that invisible from this perspective is the history of affliction endured by the innocent, a suffering that cannot be reduced to guilt and sin.

I would like to study these aspects of Gutierrez by relating them to both prophecy and tragedy. The hiddenness of God 1 will be employed to consider the prophetic manifestation of God in locations of poverty and cross both from the Hebrew prophets and the figure of Christ. The hiddenness of God 2 will allow us to examine the elements of Gutierrez which, in my view, has affinities with tragedy. Central to this aspect of Gutierrez is a confrontation with innocent suffering and a struggle with God in the face of destructive evil.

The Hiddenness of God in Gutierrez

While Gutierrez does not develop his reflections on the problem of God and suffering exactly in terms of the hiddenness of God 1 and 2, the issues involved here are

¹²Hans Blumenberg speaks of an absolutizing of sin in Christianity due to the dominant influence of Augustine. In his words: "The answer that Augustine gave to this question (theodicy) was to have the most important consequences of all the decisions that he made for the Middle Ages. With a gesture just as stirring as it was fateful, he took for man and upon man the responsibility for the burden oppressing the world. Now, in the aftermath of Gnosticism, the problem of the justification of God has become overwhelming, and that justification is accomplished at the expense of man, to whom a new concept of freedom is ascribed expressly in order to let the whole of an enormous responsibility and guilt be imputed to it." See The Legitimacy of the Modern Age (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983) 133.

implicit in his thought. Through his reading of the Hebrew bible, Gutierrez does indeed mention the significance of God's hiddenness. In the prophets, for example, God withdraws his presence and hides himself when and where injustice and wickedness thrive. Yahweh leaves the temple when it becomes a den of thieves. "This prompts me to reflect on a dialectic often found in the Bible: the tension between God's visibility and invisibility, between God's obviousness and hiddenness" (GL 69). The hiddenness in this case expresses the absence of God when the will of God is rejected. "But all these absences have a single theological meaning: God is not there because the reign of God is not accepted; because God's will is not carried out" (GL 75). *Sin* is the target of this prophetic reading of the hiddenness of God. In another manner, Gutierrez interprets the hidden God as the Lord who dwells in the underside of history and society. This God will not be found in the glory and wealth of the world; instead "God's presence is often hidden; God is present in what is insignificant and anonymous. On many occasions God brings a work of justice or salvation to completion in a hidden manner. God's dwelling in history is not simple and obvious, so that it may be found quickly, directly, and unmistakably" (GL 80). I am referring to these aspects of the theology of Gutierrez as the hiddenness of God 1.

Hiddenness of God 2 in Gutierrez is the more disturbing struggle with God's absence in the face of evil. Here, with Job, Jeremiah, or the suffering servant of Isaiah, God seems to be absent from the afflicted and oppressed. Order, beauty, and meaning seem to be absent and hidden. "Job's suffering causes him to see the universe as chaotic, as lacking the presence of God; from it God is absent as the one who creates it and

shapes it into a cosmos" (OJ 8). Most relevant to these two senses of Divine hiddenness is Gutierrez's interpretation of the struggle of Job. Recall that the suffering Job endures leads him to conclude that God is his enemy. Job reproaches God. He dares to say that God laughs at the plight of the innocent and destroys the innocent and guilty alike (Job 9:15-24). In his experiences, Job sees himself as more than a victim of God's absence; instead he is, more terrifyingly, a victim of God's direct violence. On the verge of resignation and despair, however, Job makes an odd appeal. He calls out for a divine mediator, a defender or avenger of his case. "I know that I have a living Avenger (*Go'el*) and that at the end he will rise up above the dust. After they pull my flesh from me, and I am without my flesh, I shall see God" (Job 19:25-26). Job appeals to God against God. The remarks of Gutierrez are very significant.

It might almost be said that Job, as it were, splits God in two and produces a God who is judge and a God who will defend him at that supreme moment; a God whom he experiences as almost an enemy but whom he knows at the same time to be truly a friend. He has just now accused God of persecuting him, but at the same he knows God is just and does not want human beings to suffer. These are two sides of the one God. This painful, dialectical approach to God is one of the most profound messages of the Book of Job (OJ 65).

I believe it is helpful to associate these two sides of the one God as hiddenness 1 and 2. However idiosyncratic this approach may seem, Gutierrez insists that it is necessary. "The seeming lack of logic in this way of looking at God is simply a sign that any approach to the mystery of God must be complex" (OJ 66).

*The Hiddenness of God I*The Hiddenness of God in the Prophets

Gutierrez locates the decisive contribution of the Israelite prophets in their vision of God's revelation through the events and vicissitudes of history. The covenantal relationship with God is established through the hopes, expectations, and sufferings of history. Unlike the pagan religious traditions, the prophets insist that God is disclosed primarily through a salvific word in history, rather than through the regularity and beauty of nature. "Other religions think in terms of cosmos and nature; Christianity, rooted in Biblical sources, thinks in terms of history. And in this history, injustice and oppression, divisions and confrontations exist" (TL 174). In Gutierrez's later work, without a doubt, he qualifies this interpretation by maintaining that Judaism and Christianity also think in terms of cosmos and nature.¹³ Nevertheless, his major point is still valid: the prophets interpret God's actions vis-a-vis the historical struggles of the nation Israel. In particular, the event of the Exodus becomes a central and foundational narrative for Israelite identity (Deuteronomy 6:20-25). The alienation, exile, and oppression which Israel endures at the hands of Egypt will leave an indelible mark on the memory of this people. To remain faithful to God is to remember the history of the people, that they were once slaves in Egypt.

¹³In The God of Life and On Job the manifestation of God through the form and beauty of the cosmos is central to his understanding of Christianity. The strong contrast between the element of history in the Jewish traditions and that of nature in the pagan traditions is overstated in A Theology of Liberation. Biblical scholars have pointed out the complexity of the Jewish traditions and have especially made us more aware of the relationship of Israel with God through the order and regularity of nature and the seasons. The importance of Mount Zion, for example, is interpreted as a manifestation of beauty of the whole cosmos. Metaphors of vision, rather than mere hearing, take center stage with sacred space of Zion. See Jon Levenson, Sinai and Zion (New York: HarperCollins, 1985).

To be sure, this narrative of oppression and suffering and, consequently, of liberation and freedom is central to the theology of Gutierrez. Salvation is an intrahistorical reality (TL 152). Here God is revealed not in the power and glory of the masters, but instead in the wretchedness and poverty of the slaves. God hears the cries of the poor and oppressed and intervenes to deliver them. Redemption occurs through the liberating acts of God in history. Thus, we can be more precise and suggest that not only is the God of Israel revealed in history, but more specifically in the underside of history. For Gutierrez, the sixteenth century Dominican Bartolome de Las Casas was able to discover as much when he went seeking God not in the mines of gold, but rather in the denuded and exploited faces of the Indians. For Las Casas, this was nothing less than a remembering of the Exodus.¹⁴ The oppression and the brutality of the Spaniards is akin to the Egyptian oppression of Israel, he argued, but even worse: not "Pharaoh and the Egyptians themselves committed such cruelties" (LC 39). The memory of suffering inspires the task of Las Casas and provides a horizon for interpreting the suffering in his own time. The reading of the prophetic tradition by Gutierrez is also profoundly animated by hope. The story of Exodus is, after all, a story of liberation and journey to the promised land. Gutierrez shares the same hope in history as the prophets. "In the face of skepticism and of the possible discouragement of those who see themselves being crushed by the forces of injustice, the Lord says that his will to life for all can indeed

¹⁴Throughout much of his work, Gutierrez maintains that this memory of suffering (that we were all once slaves in Egypt) is the basis for compassion (PPH 5-8; WDW 79). In Gutierrez's reading, Las Casas creatively claims that the basis for this understanding of compassion is a willingness to empathize with the suffering of others, to put ourselves in their shoes. Thus, Las Casas will often mention that we should treat the Indians as if we were Indians (LC 87-88, 221, 92-93).

take flesh in history" (GL 93). Gutierrez avers that the eschatological dimension of the prophets is a vision that brings life and hope to history. In spite of the catastrophes of history, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, for instance, hold that God will renew Israel and bring a new everlasting covenant to Israel (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:22-32). "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek 36:26). Gutierrez claims that this hopeful posture towards the future is a key characteristic of the Israelite prophets (TL 163). The promise of what is to come lends meaning and purpose to the present.

In addition to the dimension of history, Gutierrez maintains that the prophets embody an ethical vision which leads them to criticize an exclusive focus on cultic worship. It is not fasting and sacrifices that the Lord wants; to loose the fetters of injustice, to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, this is what the Lord desires (TL 196; Isa 1:10-17, 58:6-7; Hos 6:4-6). When Jeremiah reproaches the Israelites for turning the temple of the Lord into a den of thieves, he makes it clear that God will consequently depart from that holy space. "Put not your trust in the deceitful words: 'This is the temple of the Lord! The temple of the Lord! The temple of the Lord!' Only if you thoroughly reform your ways and your deeds; if each of you deals justly with his neighbor; if you no longer oppress the resident alien, the orphan, and the widow....will I remain with you in this place...." (GL 70; Jer 1:1-7). God will hide his face when the poor and weak are exploited and abused.

The figure of Las Casas prophetically incorporates this ethical sensitivity. Indeed, Gutierrez demonstrates how a passage from Sirach was crucial in awakening Las Casas

from his slumber (LC 47). "The Most High is not pleased with the offerings of the ungodly, nor for a multitude of sacrifices does he forgive sins. Like one who kills a son before his father's eyes is the person who offers a sacrifice from the property of the poor. The bread of the needy is the life of the poor; whoever deprives them of it is a murderer" (Sirach 23-25). Las Casas consequently associates the poor of Scripture with the Indians of the 'New World', by no means an obvious move (LC 313). The Indians are those poor whose "belly cleaves to their backbone from pure hunger" (LC 313-14). The Spaniards not only deprive them of their daily bread, but more viciously they devour them as wild animals devour their prey (LC 447). In the face of these injustices, blindness and slumber can only be partners in crime. As Las Casas puts it, "God sleeps not when these injustices occur;" so too must we be roused from our slumber.

The reality of sin is, in this light, a glaring and blatant force. Gutierrez claims that awareness of sin is central to liberation theology (TSMYF 31, 138). This sin manifests itself in a self-centered turning in upon oneself that is the ultimate cause of want, injustice, and oppression (TSMYF 15). In *A Theology of Liberation* he insists that there are particular responsible agents for sin; it does not happen by chance (TL 175). These actions contrary to God's will result in God's withdrawal. The presence or absence of God, he argues, is an effect of human freedom and actions (ELC 82). As Jeremiah puts it, the sins of the people have provoked God's wrath and hiddenness. "The Chaldeans are coming in to fight and to fill them (Israelite houses) with the dead bodies of those whom I shall strike down in my anger and my wrath, for I have hidden my face from this

city because of all their wickedness" (Jer 33:5).¹⁵

The focus on history and the experiences of injustice, oppression, and violence leads us to highlight another important aspect of the theology of Gutierrez, namely, the reality of conflict in history and society.¹⁶ While not seeking or advocating conflict, the classic prophets announced a word of judgement and rebuke which often conflicted with the ruling groups of society. Far from being the intended outcome of their vocation, conflict was often the effect of the prophet's faithful witness to the covenant with God. The reluctance and resistance of the prophet in the face of God's overwhelming call should remind us of the harsh and unhappy vocation of the prophet. Certainly the laments of the prophets (Jeremiah, Jonah, the suffering servant of Isaiah) express the anguish of being ostracized and ridiculed by others; the pain of conflict and suffering is transparent.

For Gutierrez, the conflict that we cannot avoid is simply the result of a prophetic faithfulness, of solidarity with the poor and oppressed. "The proclamation of this liberating love in the midst of a society characterized by injustice and the exploitation of one social class by another social class is what will make this emergent history something

¹⁵The prophet Isaiah expresses a similar sentiment. Addressing himself to God, he declares that "there is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you, for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity" (Isaiah 64:7). In this context, however, Isaiah does not merely relate God's hiddenness to human sin. Indeed, he complains that God has hardened the hearts of Israel and causes people to turn away from him. "Why, O Lord, do you make us stray from your ways and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you?" (Isaiah 63:17).

¹⁶One could argue that this prophetic sense of conflict is at the heart of Marx's interpretation of history. In Hegel one could argue that this sense of prophetic conflict in history (that history is a slaughter-bench) is related to Hegel's theology of the cross. For an interesting work which traces the origins of dialectic in Marx to the Christian Platonists (e.g., Eriugena, Eckhart, Nicholas of Cusa) see Leszek Kolakowski, Main Currents of Marxism, Volume I, The Founders (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

challenging and filled with conflict. This is how we bring to pass the truth of God at the very heart of a society in which social classes confront one another with hostility. For we shall be taking sides with the poor, with the populous classes, with the ethnic groups others scorn, with cultures that are marginalized" (PPH 18). Taking sides with the dispossessed frequently will demand confrontation and clash. The hunger for justice and righteousness involves a willingness to resist, challenge, and struggle. For Gutierrez, this inevitable presence of conflict attests to the reality of power and politics in human life. Politics embraces the entire dimension of human endeavors. "Politics is the global condition, and the collective field, of human accomplishment" (PPH 47). An a-political way of life is implausible, he contends. To be human at all means to be historically and socially incarnate, to be implicated in the field of power-interests and political conflict. Neutrality in the face of injustice and exploitation is nothing more than a false peace.

The appeal to conciliation and peace can be, in this case, a subterfuge for the preservation of unjust conditions. "Such a conciliation can be only a justifying ideology for a profound disorder, a device for the few to keep living off the poverty of the many" (TL 48). Against a false optimism Gutierrez reminds us of the dark, destructive, and violent facets of history. There is tragic conflict between entire races, cultures, classes, nations, parts of the world, etc. (TL 36). The prophet Jeremiah excoriated the dishonesty and self-deluding claims of those whose indifference and apathy prevented them from recognizing the injustice and suffering. "They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace." (Jeremiah 6:14). Far from celebrating or advocating conflict, however, Gutierrez laments the fact of conflict in

human life. To ignore it, nevertheless, is to deceive oneself and to undermine efforts to transform violence into true peace (TL 274). We must be willing to face the realities of oppression, exploitation, suffering, cross.

As Christians, he continues, we must equally avoid the debasement of justice into revenge and hatred. For Gutierrez, a recognition of conflict "cannot be allowed to justify a denial of, or exception to, the universality of Christian love" (TSMYF 39). Love animates justice with a spirit of gratuity and tenderness without subverting the harsh demands of justice in the midst of inequality and violence. In the new introduction to the second edition of *A Theology of Liberation*, he explains that such love and struggle was central to the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethemene. The prayers of Jesus involved agony and combat. "Luke tells us that he was 'in an agony' as he struggled for his life, so that his sweat 'became like great drops of blood' (Luke 22:44-45). Our communion with the prayer of Jesus must reach this point of 'agony'—that is, of combat (that is what the Greek word *agonia* means). But this requirement is not difficult for those to understand who are putting their own lives on the line as they share the lot of the stripped and impoverished of Latin America" (2TL xxxi-xxxii). The agony of the defeated of history inspires the theological task of Gutierrez. As the above quote suggests, for Gutierrez God is profoundly revealed in the anguish and suffering of Jesus Christ.

The Hidden God in Jesus Christ: Theology of the Cross

Luther, Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Karl Barth: one central element runs through the

lives and thought of these dialectical thinkers, namely, Christ crucified.¹⁷ In the case of Luther, for instance, it is by lament and affliction that we come to know God and not, note, through the beauty of nature or the achievements of reason or culture. The sense of human participation in the cosmos and the sense of God's immanence in creation is relatively absent in these great theologians of the cross. By 'negative theology' Luther wants to insist that reflection on God is only possible through negative and conflictual experiences in history. Theology is meaningless without a relationship to the suffering God, Jesus Christ. "But if we wish to give a true definition of 'negative theology'," Luther says in opposition to Pseudo-Dionysius, "we should say that it is the holy cross and the afflictions in which we do not discern God, but in which nevertheless those sighs are present of which I have already spoken."¹⁸ Those sighs that are present in human life, Luther had remarked, are the "sighs too deep for words" (Romans 8:26), the ineffable experiences of terror, abandonment by God, physical and spiritual suffering. Indeed, for Luther and another sixteenth century figure, John of the Cross, the dark nights of the soul are afflictions which participate in the cross of Christ.

Without a doubt, this theology of the cross is central to Gutierrez. Indeed, Gutierrez maintains that both Exodus and cross are central to his work (PPH 16; TSMYF

¹⁷Obviously, a discussion of a theology of the cross in these thinkers is beyond the scope of this chapter and dissertation. I do believe, however, that all of these thinkers embody a dialectical thought which interprets Divine revelation in opposition or confrontation with nature, culture, reason, natural human love, anthropology. God is not to be discovered through the glory and power of Christendom (Kierkegaard), nor through the achievements of reason (Pascal), nor via natural human love (eros) (Barth), but rather through the love transformed by the gratuitous love of God in the figure of Christ crucified. Christ crucified is a scandal to human wisdom, a transvaluation of the values of the world.

¹⁸See Luther's Works, Volume 13, Selected Psalms 2, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956) 111.

20). The Eucharist embraces both elements insofar as it is a remembrance of the death of Christ and at the same time a celebration originally instituted in light of the Exodus as the Passover meal. For Gutierrez, then, we must carefully look to the experiences of cross and oppression in history to discern God's truth, justice, and love. The person of Jesus Christ is unrecognizable to those who look elsewhere for Divine reality. Jesus is a hidden God. "God's presence in history makes itself known only in an unobtrusive way that necessitates spiritual discernment. The Bible often refers to God as a hidden God....Christ makes himself present precisely through those who are 'absent' from history, those who are not invited to the banquet (see Luke 14:15-24), those who are not the great ones of the world, the respected, 'the wise and understanding' (Matthew 11:25)" (TSMYF 157; also GL 80). The absent ones of history are those persons and groups ostracized and shunned by the community; they are those non-persons virtually regarded as dead. Jesus himself, Gutierrez remarks, was one of those absent ones. He was born on the margins of an insignificant nation. There was nothing in his form nor appearance that would intimate greatness, as with the suffering servant of Isaiah.¹⁹ "That is why many have trouble recognizing him. The God who became flesh in Jesus is the hidden God of whom the prophets speak to us. Jesus shows himself to be such precisely in the measure that he is present via those who are the absent, anonymous people of history--those who are not the controllers of history...." (GL 86). If Jesus is a king, he is not a king in the eyes of the world. His kingship is of service, powerlessness, and compassion (GL 87).

¹⁹"For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering..." (Isaiah 53:2-3).

In the figure of Jesus, the hidden God identifies with the poor, afflicted, and outcasts of history. In the extraordinary vision of Las Casas, the suffering features of Christ are discovered in the scarred faces of an entire oppressed people. God is revealed in those persons whom the 'civilized' peoples name savage and primitive.

Supposing, Sir," Las Casas interrogatingly asks, "that you were to see Our Lord Jesus Christ abused--someone laying hands on him, afflicting him, and insulting him with all manner of vituperation--would you not beg with the greatest urgency and with all your strength that he be handed over to you instead, that you might worship and serve and please him and do everything with him that, as a true Christian, you ought to do? 'I surely would', replied the other....Indeed, Sir," Las Casas responds, "I have but acted in that very manner. *For I leave, in the Indies, Jesus Christ, our God, scourged and afflicted and buffeted and crucified, not once but millions of times....* (LC 62; my emphasis).

The crime of the Spaniards is, Las Casas concludes, nothing short of blasphemy. They are, however, completely oblivious to this desecration of God's presence. They are blind to the hidden God; they only see and adore the visible god of gold and might. In fact, the Spaniards contend that Las Casas is misreading the gospels and lying about God's compassion for the wretched of the earth. "When we preach to the Indians the humility and poverty of Jesus Christ, and how he suffered for us, and how God rejoices in the poor and in those the world despises, they think we are lying to them" (LC 18). They are, no doubt, scandalized by the disturbing message of the cross.

Not surprisingly, Gutierrez's thought is informed by St. Paul's reading of the scandalous Word of the cross. Paul's theology of the cross provocatively suggests that God has, first and foremost, called those of ignoble birth, the weak and ignorant in the world (GL 105). "Not many of you were wise by human standards," Paul remarks, "not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. Rather, God chose the foolish of the

world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something" (Cor 1:26-28). The wisdom that God showers on these persons and groups is a wisdom born of suffering. Such a wisdom is often a stumbling block and folly to comfortable intellectuals, Gutierrez contends (PPH 103). The folly of the cross eschews strictly rational attempts to explain life. It charges such projects with a failure to face death, conflict, and suffering. Participation in the cross, on the contrary, may yield an insight imperceptible by other existential situations (TL 49). Job's friends do not accurately speak of God, Gutierrez claims, because "they have not experienced the abandonment, poverty, and pain that Job has" (OJ 29). It is the conditions of the poor, the blind and lame that lead them to speak of God correctly, that is, to recognize God's presence in the ignominious and base life of Jesus Christ. This wisdom is revealed to babes and hidden from the wise (Matt 11:25-26).

The cry of Jesus on the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?,' is folly for those who expect God to be displayed by manifestations of power, domination, and glory. The anguish of divine abandonment expressed by Psalm 22, which Jesus quotes, is all-too-common to the lives of many peoples in history and society. In Latin America, this experience of affliction is often represented by the images and symbols of Christ and the saints. In his essay on Jose Maria Arguedas, Gutierrez mentions one of the Peruvian figures of Christ in Latin America known as the 'Lord of the Terrified'. Gutierrez quotes the following description of 'El Senor de los Temblores' from the pages of Arguedas. "Renegrido, padeciendo, el Senor tenia us silencio que no

apaciguaba. Hacia sufrir; en la catedral tan vasta, entre las llamas de las velas y el resplandor del día que llegaba tan atenuado, el rostro del Cristo creaba sufrimiento, lo extendía a las paredes, a las bóvedas y columnas. Yo esperaba que de ella brotaran lágrimas" (ELC 76). The dark face of Christ: silent, dislocated, fragile; suffering emanated from his form. Indeed, such an image is born through the plight of the Latin American people.

For Gutierrez, though, such an interpretation of the suffering God is also central to the God revealed in the Scriptures. Not only in the New Testament, but also in the suffering servant of Isaiah, for instance, can we detect this same sense of tragic suffering. Indeed, the suffering servant is the one who is despised and rejected by all, a person of suffering from whom society averts its eyes in revulsion (Isaiah 53:3). Perhaps even more interesting is the interpretive possibility that the suffering servant represents the entire nation of Israel during the time of Babylonian exile and oppression. The suffering servant, then, is not merely an individual, but rather an anguished expression of lament by Israel (as is the case of the book of *Lamentations* as well). The history of this nation's suffering pierces through the centuries.

This kind of a tragic vision cannot solely be understood within the prophetic tradition, that is, within the paradigm of redemption and sin. The suffering servant of Isaiah, many of the Psalms, Jesus's cry of abandonment, Job, the history of suffering persons and groups, all such expressions of pain are mistreated and abused when reduced to a consequence of the fall of Adam.

The Hiddenness of God 2

Whereas the hiddenness of God 1 reads God's *presence* as disclosed in locations of cross, the sense of hiddenness of God 2 raises the more troubling issue of God's *absence*--or violence--in the face of evil in history and nature. The question of theodicy (the conflict between the goodness and omnipotence of God and the reality of evil) is confronted in a way that eschews the explanation of evil in relation to human sin and guilt. The problem of evil is faced in an extraordinary manner in the book of *Job*. Not only in this text is the cry of suffering audible, however. The texts of the Psalms, Lamentations, and the prophets express the agony of unjust affliction. They often do so in reference to the hiddenness of God. Consider Psalm 44 where the author laments the humiliating and crushing defeat at the hands of an enemy: "All of this has come upon us, yet we have not forgotten you, or been false to your covenant. Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from your way, yet you have broken us in the haunt of jackals, and covered us with a deep darkness....Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord? Awake, do not cast us off forever! Why do you hide your face?" (Psalm 44:17-19, 23-24) It seems here that it is God not the people who has forgotten the covenant! This Divine forgetfulness and hiddenness is restated many times, as in Psalm 13: "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" (Psalm 13:1; also Psalms 22, 69, 88, 89, 102). The Psalms utter words of complaint in the face of experiences in which God has forgotten his mercy and forgotten the life of the poor (Psalms 74, 77). Clearly, the book of Lamentations also expresses this grief in the midst of God's hiddenness. The people who yearn to see God's face are afflicted by the

absence of God's face.²⁰

Indeed, Gutierrez provocatively suggests that this Divine hiddenness or silence is particularly disturbing to those who seek God's face and believe that God is loving and merciful. They are the ones who have the problem of theodicy. Does the silence of God in the face of unjust affliction lead us to conclude that God is not unlike the pagan gods, mute and deaf? "The silence of God is hardest to bear," Gutierrez explains, "for those who believe that the God of our faith is a living God and not like the 'gods' of whom the psalmist says: 'They have mouths, but do not speak' (Ps 115:5)" (OJ xv). Is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jesus, then, just like the pagan gods who stand silent in the face of injustice and suffering? The book of Joel pleads with God to remember his kindness in order to disprove the enemies of Israel who mock Yahweh. "Why should it be said among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'" (Joel 2:17). Is God's hiddenness a piercing silence that hears not the cries of Israel, that disregards the laments of the poor and oppressed? These tough questions are not as blasphemous as one might think. The struggle with and against God is at the heart of the Scriptures.

Abraham, Jacob, and Moses all illustrate not only faith and hope in God, but also a willingness to contest God. Their lives represent a dispute or contest with God (*agonia*). In Genesis, for instance, Abraham takes issue with God's intention to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (as God had already done so with the entire creation by means of the great flood). Abraham critically asks God, "Will you indeed sweep away the

²⁰"Why have you forgotten us completely? Why have you forsaken us these many days?" (Lamentations 5:20). See Richard Elliot Friedman, The Hidden Face of God (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1995) for an interesting reading of God's hiddenness in the Hebrew bible.

righteous with the wicked?...Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked!" (Genesis 18:23,25). Abraham pleads with God not to forget his mercy.²¹ The archetypal prophet himself, Moses, also challenges the decisions of God. In the incident of the golden calf in Exodus, God is tempted to destroy the whole lot of Israel. Moses implores God not to allow his wrath to cause him to forget his promises and mercy. "Now let me alone," God angrily utters, "so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them....But Moses implored the Lord his God, and said, O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?...Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on the people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them...." (Exodus 32:10-14). By appealing to the covenant and God's promises, Moses successfully gets God to repent of his harsh intentions. Finally, the story of Jacob wrestling with God will have a decisive significance for the naming of the nation as Israel (Genesis 32:22-32). The name Israel will come to mean he who wrestles with God (see Hosea 12:3-4).

In a sense these stories are related to the sins of the nation Israel. Yet, the complaints of Abraham and Moses are more precisely directed against the anger of God which would destroy the righteous and wicked together and, consequently, cause God to forget his promises of old. God's merciful face is hidden. The Christian tradition,

²¹It should be noted that Genesis 20:7 calls Abraham a prophet for his ability to intercede with Yahweh.

especially through Christ's cry of abandonment on the cross, also confronts the tension between God's anger and mercy and, concomitantly, the tension between unjust affliction and the experience of love. The words of Martin Luther are most explosive and provocative when dealing with these issues. Luther distinguishes between God as revealed and clothed in the Word of Christ, on the one hand, and the hidden God as he is in his own nature and majesty, on the other. While the former face of God "does not deplore the death of His people which He Himself works in them, but He deplors the death which He finds in His people and desires to remove from them. God preached works to the end that sin and death may be taken away, and we may be saved....But God hidden in Majesty neither deplors nor takes away death, but works life and death and all in all..."²² The will of the latter hidden God is, Luther says, inscrutable and incomprehensible; fear is the natural response to this face of God. Not unlike the position of Abraham, Luther sees the hidden God (outside of the incarnate Word) bringing death to the righteous and wicked alike; God works life and death and all in all. Does Luther insinuate that God is unjust? Does Luther betray a dissatisfaction and complaint against God? It seems to me that in Luther the answer to the first question is no and to the second one, perhaps.

Luther argues that this conflict between the two faces of the Divine is more noetic than ontological; that is, the problem originates with the human mind not with the Being

²²Bondage of the Will, trans. John Dillenberger, Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings (New York: Anchor Books, 1962) 190-91.

of God Himself.²³ The fault lies with the fallen condition of sinful humanity, not with God. Along these lines, Luther argues that if one follows the judgment of human reason then the conclusion that either God is unjust or that God does not exist will naturally follow. "God governs the external affairs of the world in such a way that, if you regard and follow the judgement of human reason, you are forced to say, either that there is no God, or that God is unjust....Hereupon some of the greatest minds have fallen into denying the existence of God, and imagining that Chance governs all things at random."²⁴ No doubt, in Luther human history is quasi-apocalyptic. Luther sees human history not as a gradual and evolving continuity; instead, history is terrifyingly chaotic, interruptive, and discontinuous.²⁵ Indeed, it seems clear that Luther expected in his own century the final eschatological disclosure and judgement of God. In this picture of human life it is not surprising that the good suffer and the wicked prosper, Luther maintains.²⁶ It is the way of the world that the innocent suffer and sinners are filled with riches and power. Thus, the issue of theodicy is clearly at issue in Luther's reflections on the Hidden God.

²³For Luther, the fall has severely destroyed both free will and reason. Reason is a whore that does not understand, fear, nor trust God. Luther's negative anthropology places the fault of suffering and evil in the lap of human nature. See his Commentary on Galatians in Martin Luther, op.cit., 128.

²⁴Bondage of the Will, op.cit., 201.

²⁵In the words of Heiko A. Oberman, "Luther was proclaiming the Last Days, not the modern age." See his Luther: Man Between God and the Devil (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 79. David Tracy has noted the transformation in the art work of Michelangelo. The hope and confidence of Christian humanism leads him to create in his early years the tender work of the *Pieta* and the *David*. Later after Rome is sacked and the violence of religious wars and division is precipitated by the Reformation, Michelangelo turns to see history through his work on the Last Judgement. Here the face of God is one of wrath and history is terrifyingly chaotic. See Dialogue with the Other (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1990) 121.

²⁶Bondage of the Will, op.cit., 201.

The fact that Luther argues that the conflict between the two faces of God is noetic does not lead Luther to silence his dissatisfaction at the 'external affairs of the world', however. He mentions that many of the great prophets, from Moses and David to Jeremiah and Job, were tempted to reproach the injustice of God.²⁷ In Luther's commentary on the Psalms (which he claims were written by Moses), he reflects on the question of God's wrath:

In this way Moses leads over to the real point of his discourse, and he complains, not without tears, about the burden of God's wrath; as if he were saying: 'Is it not a most terrible calamity that only man, in contradistinction to all other living creatures, lives such a miserable life and afterwards perishes because of God's wrath'....One almost suspects a note of blasphemy in this interpretation of Moses....Who can continually give thought to God's wrath and not mutter disapproval? Even the innocent creature cannot bear its sufferings without intense protest. A hog that is slaughtered expresses its revolt and distress by its squeal. A tree that is cut down does not tumble to the ground without a creaking noise. Therefore, how can human nature bear to think of God's wrath without tears, without muttering, without the most vigorous protest?²⁸

Luther does insist that one must control these natural impulses of protest, as one controls the excessive appetite of the passions. If this feeling of disapproval is not controlled, he explains, the end result will not only be blasphemy, but also despair and hopelessness. Within limits, nevertheless, such impulses can lead us to a right sense of awe and fear, he dares to suggest. "Therefore such thoughts of blasphemy are indeed terrifying. But they are nevertheless good, provided that one controls them...."²⁹ He concludes that they may be seen in a positive light insofar as they instruct us, painfully to be sure, in the

²⁷ibid.

²⁸Luther's Works, Volume 13, Selected Psalms 2, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956) 106-07.

²⁹ibid. 110.

cross of Christ.³⁰

Of course, Gutierrez does not develop his reflections on the hiddenness of God in the same way as we have just now done. In his reading of the book of Job, however, these issues irrepressibly surface. More clearly than with Luther, Gutierrez insists that reflection on the nature of suffering and evil in history cannot be understood simply within the paradigm of sin and guilt. While appearing to be piously defending God, the friends of Job speak incorrectly of God; they defend God by "dishonest argument" (OJ 29; Job 13:7). In Gutierrez's view, the position of Job's friends is all-too-common among experts in theology; such theologians do not take account of the concrete situations and sufferings of human beings. Job's friends contend that Job is condemning God and "Job, put on the defensive, answers that God is not to be justified by condemning the innocent" (OJ 30). Indeed, the book of Job maintains that it is Job who has spoken correctly of God, not his friends (OJ 11; Job 42:7-8). Job's laments and protests are not, then, sinful: they are tortuous expressions in the face of terrible affliction. Job is led to curse the day of his birth: "Perish the day on which I was born and the night that told of a boy conceived. Why was I not still-born, or why did I not perish as I left the womb?" (Job 3:1-3,11). Jeremiah cries out in a similar manner: "Why did I come forth from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?" (Jer 14:18). In the case of Job, the

³⁰Another avenue of exploration concerning the question of evil and suffering in the thought of Luther would be a study of the Devil in Luther. To be sure, for Luther the Devil is a real and destructive force, a force which is particularly active and powerful in his own apocalyptic age (not only in the figure of the papacy but also through the violent events of his time, e.g. the Peasants War, religious persecution, the threat of Turks in Europe, etc.). See Heiko A. Oberman Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, op. cit.. Also Bernard McGinn Anti-Christ: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994) 200-208.

problem is not exactly related to God's absence, but rather to the apparent violence of God in his life.

As with Abraham and Luther, Job deplores the fact that God seems to destroy the innocent and guilty alike: "It is all one, and hence I boldly say: he destroys innocent and guilty alike....If not he, who else?" (Job 9:22,24; OJ 57). Job seeks to bring a lawsuit against these actions of God. In order to proceed with the lawsuit he only asks God to "remove your hand, which lies so heavily on me, no longer make me cower from your terror" (Job 13:21; OJ 61). Gutierrez notes all the metaphors of Divine violence in the book of Job. The terror that God's hand brings is God's inscrutable wrath. "He has torn me in his wrath, and hated me; he has gnashed his teeth at me; my adversary sharpens his eyes against me....I was at ease, and he broke me in two; he seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces; he set me up as his target; his archers surround me. He slashes open my kidneys, and shows no mercy; he pours out my gall on the ground. He bursts upon me again and again; he rushes at me like a warrior" (Job 9,12-14; OJ 63). Elsewhere Job complains, "Even when I cry out, 'Violence!' I am not answered; I call aloud, but there is no justice....His troops come on together; they have thrown up siegeworks against me, and encamp around my tent....My bones cling to my skin and to my flesh, and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth" (Job 19:7,12,20). God is portrayed in less than flattering terms: He is like a ruthless warrior or a military commander sending his troops out to kill. As shocking as such images are, they are not unique to the book of Job.

The Psalms cry out in similar ways: "O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger, or

discipline me in your wrath. For your arrows have sunk into me, and your hand has come down on me" (Psalm 38:1-2). It is God who feeds Israel the bread of tears, another Psalm has it (80:5-6). Lamentations, moreover, compares God to a vicious animal. "He is a bear lying in wait for me, a lion in hiding; he led me off my way and tore me to pieces; he had made me desolate; he bent his bow and set me as a mark for his arrow" (Lam 10-12). The book of Lamentations maintains that both good and evil come from God (Lam 3:38). Of course, in the prophets lamentations and protests unto God are definitely present, even if they are most often (though not always) related more clearly to the sin and guilt of the nation Israel (see Jer 14:19). Confronted both with his own experiences and his reading of the Scriptures, Luther concludes that in the Scriptures God rebukes and threatens by the metaphor of arrows.³¹

The sense of divine wrath or violence in the Scriptures is interpreted by Gutierrez as most brutal in relation to experiences of communal and historical suffering. In Gutierrez's opinion, a crucial insight of the classic text of Job is the awareness of injustice and undeserved affliction outside of Job's own personal experience. Job moves from a position of lament concerning his own fate to a tragic awareness of the suffering of other innocent persons and groups. Gutierrez quotes the following passage from Job: "The wicked move boundary-marks away, they carry off flock and shepherd. They drive away the orphan's donkey, as security, they seize the widow's ox. The needy have to keep out of the way, poor country people have to keep out of sight....They go about naked, lacking clothes, and starving while they carry the sheaves....From the towns come

³¹ibid, Volume 14, Selected Psalms 3, 156.

the groans of the dying and the gasp of the wounded crying for help. Yet God remains deaf to prayer!" (OJ 33; Job 24:2-4,7,12). Job learns that however painful and distressing his own experience is, he is not alone. The wicked thrive and the good suffer--this state of affairs is more than Job's problem.

To be sure, Gutierrez is painfully aware of the unjust suffering of the innocent in his own continent of Latin America. No doubt, it is clear that the text of Job, as well as the other wisdom literature of the Hebrew bible, provides Gutierrez and the people of Latin America (and obviously beyond Latin America) with classic narratives which represent their own voices of sufferings in an honest and compassionate manner. Without discounting personal anguish and torment, the unjust suffering of whole peoples and cultures is the central fact which Gutierrez engages. Reflection from the perspective of the oppression and exile of a whole people is certainly at the core of much of the Hebrew bible. It is these experiences, Gutierrez maintains, which cause the people of the 'third worlds' to cry out to God. "In the Bible the revelation of God is given, and the most radical questions regarding it are asked, in a specific historical context. In this Psalm (Psalm 42:4-5,11) they arise out of the experience of exile, suffering, and oppression that the Jewish people underwent in Babylon. It is in such circumstances that the just are forced to face up to the challenging question of their enemies: Where is your God?" (GL 66).

As Gutierrez shows, Bartolome de Las Casas was extraordinary in his attentiveness to the unjust plight of the Indian peoples. Las Casas tells of the suffering he witnessed: "From the discovery of the Indies up until our own day they (the Indians) have been

made into mincemeat through wars most unjust--invasions perpetrated in contravention of all reason and justice and surpassing in cruelty all of the wars of the infidels and barbarians, indeed of the beasts themselves, in cruelty, in ugliness, in injustice, in wickedness, in horror and terror" (LC 233). Neither the paganism, nor the sacrificial practices of the Indians are justifications for this kind of violence and terror, contends Las Casas. It is the colonizers and not the Indians who are the true pagans and cannibals. It is against these vicious types that Micah uttered the following words: "Should you not know justice?--you who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin off my people, and the flesh off their bones; who eat the flesh of my people, flay their skin off them, break their bones in pieces, and chop them up like meat in a kettle, like flesh in a cauldron" (3:1-3). According to Las Casas, the Indians suffer as innocent victims of these cannibalistic practices; they suffer as Christ did. Elsewhere Las Casas writes that "the screams of so much spilled blood has now reached heaven. The earth can no longer bear such steeping in human blood. The angels of peace and even God, I think, must be weeping" (LC 226). Without question, Las Casas denounces the nefarious and sinful actions of the conquistadors. In Gutierrez the importance of this prophetic denunciation does not, however, preclude the element of crying and protesting unto God. Along these lines, Gutierrez mentions another extraordinary person in the figure of Guaman Poma de Ayala, a Peruvian Indian.

Poma de Ayala is harsh in condemning the human persons responsible for acts of evil, but, equally, he does not restrain his tongue from interrogating God: "Where are you then, my God, will you not hear me and help your poor?" (GL 66). He quotes Psalm

13:1-4, "Lord, how long shall I cry and thou not respond to me?," and then admonishes his readers, "Together with the prophets, speak with tearful voices, groaning with your heart and soul and mouth, tongue and eyes....Cease not to weep with the prophets, who will help you...." (LC 447-48). Gutierrez explicitly notes that this tradition of lamentations and protests unto God has been neglected by Christians today. Gutierrez comments on the above quote by Poma de Ayala: "Here is a prayer of protest. It recurs frequently in the Old Testament, but is neglected by Christians today" (LC 448).

Gutierrez then continues by speaking of Poma de Ayala's imitation of the hidden God. As with Jesus Christ, Ayala embodied in his life and thought a *kenotic* selflessness, a willingness to abandon his own social status and enter into the world of the exploited and poor. Ayala spent many years toiling and living with the Indian poor in order to write of their sufferings. As with the hidden God in Jesus Christ, Ayala emptied himself of his status and privilege in order to embrace the suffering of other human beings. In comparing the life of Christ to Ayala, Gutierrez remarks: "He too has had his hidden life, to which he assigns the unlikely, but symbolic, duration of thirty years, the length of time he has wandered all up and down the Tawantinsuyu. He has lived among the poor, having abandoned his lofty social estate, has raised his protest to God for the sufferings of which he has been a witness and which he himself has suffered, and has been devoured by those who were abusing the Indian poor, taking him for one of them" (LC 448). The lamentations of Poma de Ayala are nothing else, Gutierrez maintains, than a sharing in the cry of Jesus on the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned

me?'³²

To conclude this section, we should mention that the reflections of Gutierrez on the hiddenness of God are related to the general experience of chaos and disorder in history and society. A religious willingness to face the ambiguity of human experience militates against the distortion of religion as simply a drug, an opiate which makes one feel good. In Christianity, Gutierrez claims, God comes to provoke, challenge, and disturb the easy conscience of the modern person; Christ comes to bring the sword, not a false peace. The philosophy of Kierkegaard, likewise, is exemplary in its critique of optimistic and sentimental distortions of religion. "With the invitation to all 'who labor and are burdened', Christianity did not come into the world as a showpiece of gentle comfort, as the preacher blubberingly and falsely introduces it--but as the *absolute*....Christianity came into the world as the absolute, not, humanly speaking, for comfort; on the contrary, it continually speaks about how the Christian must suffer or about how a person in order to become and remain a Christian must endure sufferings that he consequently can avoid simply by refraining from becoming a Christian."³³

³²While Gutierrez does not mention the following examples of Native American cries of protest, they are powerful expressions of lament that deserve mention. We have available songs about the Spanish conquest; one of them is a lament named "The Fall of Tenochtitlan." "Our cries of grief rise up and out tears rain down, for Tlatelolco is lost...Weep my people: know that with these disasters we have lost the Mexican nation. The water has turned bitter, our food is bitter! These are the acts of the Giver of Life..." Another poem "Flowers and Songs of Sorrow" cries out to the Giver of Life and inquires, "Have you grown weary of your servants? Are you angry with your servants, O Giver of Life?" See Native American MesoAmerican Spirituality ed. Miguel Leon-Portilla (New York: Paulist Press, 1980) 226-28. Another example worthy of note is the North American Indian Red Cloud who exclaims these words following the massacre at Wounded Knee: "We were faint by hunger and maddened by despair. We held our dying children and felt their little bodies tremble as their soul went out and left only a dead weight in our hands...There was no hope on earth. God seemed to have forgotten us." Quoted in The Power of Words: Documents in American History, Volume 2, From 1865 ed. T.H. Breen (New York: HarperCollins, 1996) 40.

³³See Kierkegaard, Practice in Christianity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) 62-63.

Christianity is, for Kierkegaard, a nuisance and a disturbing thorn in one's life (as it was for St. Paul). The judgement of God is a disruptive and terrifying hammer or bombshell against all human pretensions and achievements.³⁴ A Christian attitude of fear and trembling has been lost in the dignified glory of Christendom. Instead, Christendom worships the power and glory of Christ; the modern world does not know the abased and humiliated God at the cross, the *Deus Absconditus* or *Deus Incognitus*. Gutierrez would certainly agree with such an analysis of aspects of Christianity in the modern world. An honest confrontation with the ugly and nocturnal face of history is too often evaded by triumphalistic interpretations of the modern age.

As we have seen, Gutierrez argues that such an honest vision is at the heart of the bible. In many Scriptural texts, there appears to be a conflict between the forces of chaos and those of order. The madness of suffering is a threat to the order and harmony of the world as well as an interruption of human reason (for Kierkegaard, suffering is an abysmal madness unfathomable to human understanding). Suffering is chaotic and disruptive of *logos*. Gutierrez argues that Israel's history of suffering attests to this sense of chaos. The forces of oppression and affliction threaten to return Israel and God's creation to an unformed and pre-created state of disorder. Oppression and violence is, thus, anti-creation. The abyss or deep in Genesis symbolizes the anarchy prior to God's act of creation (just as the flood at the time of Noah undoes God's creation). In the event of the Exodus, God delivers the Israelites from the servitude of Egypt and overcomes the

³⁴For a powerful expression of a dialectical theology see Karl Barth The Epistle to the Romans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933).

forces of disorder which threaten the existence of the nation. When God splits the Red Sea, God combats the forces of darkness and chaos. The nation of Israel is thereby re-created. This struggle against the forces of death suggests that in the Jewish tradition creation of the world and historical redemption are inextricably linked.

Gutierrez explains these two elements in the Hebrew bible by making reference to Second Isaiah's interpretation of the Exodus. Second Isaiah, writing during the Babylonian Exile, calls upon God to intervene once again and deliver his nation from violence and death. "Awake, awake, put on your strength, O arm of the Lord," says Isaiah, "awake as you did long ago, in days gone by. Was it not you who hacked the Rahab in pieces and ran the dragon through? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great abyss, and made the ocean depths a path for the ransomed" (Isaiah 51:9-10). Gutierrez comments: the "waters of the great abyss are those which enveloped the world and from which creation arose, but they are also the Red Sea which the Jews crossed to begin the Exodus" (TL 155). The dragon Rahab represents both the chaotic threat of Egypt as well as the whore of Babylon in the context of Second Isaiah. No doubt, more generally, the sea and the dragon represent the forces of anti-creation and chaos.³⁵

In the context of Job's sufferings as well, the cosmos is seen as lacking order and reason. In Job's life creation is non-creation, devoid of order; it is a continuation of the

³⁵There are indeed many texts in the Hebrew bible which suggest the persistent threat of chaos and violence in human life. For Jeremiah all of creation is threatened by void. "I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light. I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro" (Jeremiah 4:23-24). Isaiah 24:19-23 sees the earth as fragile and disharmonious: "The earth is utterly broken, the earth is torn asunder, the earth is violently shaken."

void and abyss prior to creation (OJ 8,80; Job 3:4-6). In Gutierrez's daring reading of Job he suggests that the Scriptures (as well as human experience) disclose two sides of God: on the one side, order, beauty, and love and on the other, disorder, violence, and anger. While Gutierrez does not develop this in the following manner, we might suggest that this vision of the divine is not entirely unlike the ambiguity of the Greek and pagan gods (as Simone Weil contends). Biblical scholars, for example, have argued that Near Eastern mythical stories of conflict and violence within the divine realm is not entirely absent from the bible. To be sure, the bible clearly represents a de-mythologization of the stories of war and struggle among the gods. The ethical monotheism of Yahwistic religion, on the whole, does away with the polytheism and mythical stories of pagan religions (even if parts of the Hebrew bible seem to admit the existence of other gods, these gods clearly are not worshipped by the nation Israel and they are less powerful than Yahweh). Even with this admitted, however, there are intimations of a Divine struggle with chaos in the Hebrew bible, of a rule of chaos or threat of evil that is anterior to creation and prior to the free human act of will against God.

In the Mesopotamian epic the *Enuma Elish*, it is narrated that a watery abyss existed prior to the creation of the cosmos; then a male and female god appear on the scene followed by offspring. The offspring consequently murder the father god (a tale Freud would have liked) and the widow god, Tiamat, responds with a fierce anger. One of the son gods, Marduk, faces the anger of Tiamat, does battle with her, kills her, and from her body creates the cosmos. The order of the cosmos is won through combat and violence against that which is anti-cosmos. In Babylonian religion, the chaos of the

precreation abyss or watery chaos is represented as Tiamat. The religious festivals of Babylonian religion recounted and reenacted the battle of Marduk against the chaotic threat of Tiamat's anger.³⁶ In Canaanite religion, furthermore, the god Baal is pictured as battling the chaotic sea, or Yaam.³⁷ Baal is successful and splits Yamm in two. While Yamm represents the threat of chaos, Baal is the principle of nature and the regularity, order of the seasons. Frank Moore Cross explains that another figure in Canaanite religion, Mot son of El, "represents the dark chthonic powers which bring sterility, disease, and death."³⁸ For a while, Mot, or death, seems to be winning against Baal; Mot swallows Baal. Fortunately, Baal has a sister, Anath, who slices Mot with a sword. The significance of Baal as a fertility deity is obvious here: during the dead wintery months Baal is consumed by Mot until in the spring when Anath comes to the rescue of Baal and nature is re-born. Creation overcomes the forces of chaos and death. Frank Moore Cross also shows that Baal struggles against a dragon, Lotan. This dragon is seen to have seven-heads in the same way as the beast of Revelation 12 and Tiamat of the *Enuma Elish*.

What can such bizarre tales of divine violence teach us, if they can teach us anything at all? In *The Symbolism of Evil* Paul Ricoeur explains that these Babylonian and Canaanite narratives are significant for their mythical and symbolic interpretations of

³⁶For an edition of the *Enuma Elish* see The Religions of the Ancient Near East: Sumerian-Akkadian Religious Texts and Ugaritic Epics ed. Isaac Mendelsohn (New York, 1955).

³⁷See Frank Moore Cross, Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973).

³⁸ibid, 116.

the experience of evil in human existence.³⁹ He interprets these Near Eastern myths under the rubric of the myth of chaos. To summarize his argument, Ricoeur contends that these stories about the genesis of the divine (theogony) express the possibility of a chaos anterior to order, that the principle of evil is primordial and co-extensive with the generation of the divine. When creation is established, it is established only through conflict, violence, and battle. In short, the assumption of these myths is that humanity is not the origin of evil; humanity finds evil and continues it.⁴⁰ Are these myths compatible, however, with the Jewish and Christian claim that evil emerges with human sin, the Adamic myth?

Indeed, the confession of the holiness and goodness of God (not only in the Judeo-Christian tradition, but by Plato) and the confession of the sinfulness of humanity does in fact transform the pagan myths of the Greeks and Babylonians. It is certainly true that the traditions of ethical monotheism in the Hebrew bible represent an important break with mythical patterns of ancient Near Eastern theology. Yahweh is a transcendent God who is both personal love and, yet, resistant to the idolatrous tendencies to anthropomorphize the divine as the above myths do. Yahweh is not depicted at war with other gods, nor are we given any hint that Yahweh has a genealogy. The Hebrew bible does not provide us with a theogony of the Most High. It is true that the abyss of the deep (in hebrew *Tehom*, not unlike Tiamat) is portrayed as a foe of Yahweh. In the Jewish tradition, nevertheless, the battles of Yahweh with the Sea are combined with the

³⁹Paul Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967).

⁴⁰ibid. 178, 258, 311-14.

historical traditions of the Exodus. It is thus crucial to note that this historical dimension distinguishes the Jewish tradition from Mesopotamian or Canaanite myth. Unlike these myths, there is no mythological combat between gods. Yahweh defeats historical, human enemies! Thus, while the Hebrew bible stands in continuity with mythical patterns of the ancient Near East, Judaism was transformed by formative historical events.

With this crucial caveat mentioned, it is the fundamental argument of Paul Ricoeur, and my own argument, that the importance of the Adamic myth certainly transforms, but does not abolish the insights and contributions of tragic myths and dramas. In the traditions of Israel, history and myth are combined. The idea that evil is prior to humanity is too deeply ingrained in human experience for this sentiment to be excised from the Jewish and Christian traditions. In the figure of the serpent, for example, we are reminded of a principle of evil which is always, already there, prior to the Fall. The serpent symbolizes a positive presence of evil which humanity is responsible for, no doubt, but not as the origin of this evil. Indeed, in some cases in the Old Testament, it is Yahweh who is depicted as the origin of evil, as when God hardens the hearts of Israel's enemies.⁴¹ For Christians, this experience of an evil that one inherits is fundamental to the idea of original sin. In both of these cases, evil is disclosed as an ineluctable reality that is, in part, outside of our conscious, autonomous control. Evil limits, if it does not abolish our freedom. The tension and dialectic between fate and freedom, Ricoeur notes, is at the heart of these issues. In Ricoeur's words: "We must not

⁴¹Ricoeur says: "There is no great difference in this respect between the 'hardness' of certain texts of the Old Testament and the 'blindness' of the Homeric writings and the Greek tragedians" (ibid 89).

grow weary of repeating that only he who confesses that he is the author of evil discovers the reverse of that confession, namely, the *non-positing* in the positing of evil, the always *already* there of evil, the *other* of temptation, and finally the incomprehensibility of God, who tests me and who can appear to me as my enemy."⁴²

Tragedy articulates in a mythical and dramatic manner the experience of evil as fate, destiny, or divine will; that is, evil as non-human in origin. Not surprisingly Ricoeur turns to the book of Job as a case where "the moral vision of the world was wrecked by Jewish thought itself."⁴³ Since the suffering of Job upsets a clear and rational theory of just retribution, the reappearance of tragic elements should not surprise us.

For Ricoeur, then, while the confession of the holiness of God and, concomitantly, the sinfulness of humanity is central to the Adamic myth of the Fall, the Jewish and Christian traditions preserve elements which have affinities with tragic myth. The recognition of a less rational, more chaotic and senseless element to evil (as in the book of Job) is a serious challenge to the ethical, reward-punishment framework of the Adamic myth. The importance of recognizing some truth to the tragedy lays the foundation for a less judgmental and more compassionate embrace of the afflicted of history. "Hence, it may be asked whether the Hebrew and, more generally, the Near-Eastern theme of the 'suffering Just One' does not lead back from the prophetic *accusation* to tragic *pity*."⁴⁴ In addition to providing a foundation for compassion for innocent sufferers, Ricoeur also

⁴²ibid, 324.

⁴³ibid, 314.

⁴⁴ibid, 314.

contends that tragic myth also brings us to our knees in the face of the *Deus Absconditus*; that is, it evokes in us "fear and trembling before the divine abyss, before the God whose holiness is nevertheless proclaimed by the Prophet."⁴⁵

Thus, while there is a historicizing and de-mythologizing trend in Israelite traditions, nevertheless, archaic and pagan elements manifest themselves in Israel's history, especially through this nation's historical experiences of suffering and oppression. Even the sense of conflict among the divine realm and the ambiguity of God is not altogether absent from the Hebrew bible. The problem of theodicy emerges with Israel's monotheism since it can no longer account for conflicting human experiences (chaos and order; good and evil) vis-a-vis mythical narratives of warring gods. If God is the sole master of the universe, from where does violence, chaos, and affliction come? As Job asks, "If not he, Who else?" It seems to me, and I believe that Gutierrez points to this, that the Hebrew bible still intimates that there is conflict in the cosmos, even if the conflict in history is most pronounced.⁴⁶ Complaint, lamentation, and protest express the agony of God's apparent violence against the nation Israel. While the wrath of God, for instance, is often read in terms of human sin, it is also seen as the inscrutable and unpredictable action of God.

⁴⁵ibid. 322.

⁴⁶In Entre Las Calandrias Gutierrez briefly mentions the ancient Incan myth of Inkarrí (ELC 88). Inkarrí was an ancient mythic Incan king who in the experience of the conquest, the people believe, is killed and dismembered. Their mythic king shares the suffering and death of his people. The hopes that the people express in overcoming the Spanish oppression is linked to their hope that the body of their god will be re-united and re-integrated and, thus, be able to rule the people once again with justice and peace. See Lawrence Sullivan, Icanchu's Drum: An Orientation to Meaning in South American Religions (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988) 605,883.

Reconciliation and Hope

However much this approach to the mystery of God may resemble a Manichaean or Marcionite position (two gods of good and evil), Gutierrez clearly repudiates such a conclusion. Gutierrez consistently maintains that God's actions elude any clear and rational systematization. To assert that there are two separate gods at work in creation and history not only debases the mystery of evil, for Gutierrez, but also undermines the difficulty and tragic beauty of the struggle of Job. The problem of theodicy is, thus, escaped by an easy solution which precludes struggle, protest, and hope in God. Only with monotheism is the struggle with and against God possible. "Perhaps he (Job) will go away limping, like Jacob after his contest with God, but--again like Jacob--he believes that he will be declared the winner if he grapples with God in order to receive God's blessing and that he will therefore be able to say in the end: 'I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved'" (OJ 66; my addition). In the final analysis, Gutierrez claims, the major contrast between the God-talk of Job's friends and Job is that the friends only talk *about* God and never *to* God (OJ 54). Job's God-talk is, conversely, a talk that proceeds by struggle, lament, and suffering. In the third world context of Gutierrez, the struggles and laments of the poor and oppressed share this kind of God-talk, this agonizing form of theology. While the complaints of the poor and oppressed may sound scandalous to some, he remarks, they are simply communal expressions of Christ's cry of abandonment on the cross (OJ 102-03). It is the cries of innocent sufferers which must nourish our theological efforts. In order to hear the almost inaudible cries of the afflicted we must silence our theological arguments (even those which ostensibly

seek to defend God, as in modern theism), and resist seeking explanations and solutions for the problem of evil.

Gutierrez suggests that the text of Job and a theology of the cross teach us that "the greatness of God is to be identified less with power than with freedom and gratuitous love--and with tenderness" (OJ 68-69). The monotheistic God of Christianity, he says, is a weak God who passes unnoticed and hidden to those who only have eyes for a God of power and might (OJ 100). The suffering God at the cross does not provide us with a solution to evil, but in the figure of the Crucified One Christians adore a God who empties himself of power and glory in order to be in solidarity with the afflicted of history.⁴⁷ For Gutierrez the recognition of a tenderness in this image of the weak God (not only of the cross but also of the babe at the manger) gives hope and joy to human history. In Gutierrez's reading of Job we are left, then, with a profound sense of hope and beauty. It is for this reason that I have refrained from naming Gutierrez a "tragic" thinker. This chapter has argued that there are indeed affinities with tragedy in the thought of Gutierrez. Nevertheless, it is the prophetic element which dominates in Gutierrez and includes an overriding sense of hope and joy even in human history. The reality of violence does not eclipse the reality of beauty and love in human experience in the thought of Gutierrez. "There is evil in the world, but the world is not evil. There are chaotic forces within the cosmos, but the cosmos is not a chaos" (OJ 80). While lamentations and suffering unto God is a means by which we come to know God, such

⁴⁷Paul Ricoeur also contends that in the figure of Christ Crucified, there is a reconciliation of both the Adamic and tragic myth. Christianity is, thus, a prophetic-tragic religion (op.cit., 328).

protests and complaints give way, in certain epiphanic and graced moments, to sheer gratitude, joy, and love for God and humanity. In this light, Luther is right to insist that while protest and complaint may be natural, they also must be controlled and contained. If not kept within certain limits, bitterness, despair, and hatred may too easily consume and destroy the human spirit.

Thus, there are times to face the dark and tragic reality of existence, and others when we are overwhelmed by beauty, consolation, even ecstasy. The message of the prophets moves us by their heightened awareness of suffering, but they also do not fail to inspire us by their attestation of the redeeming and tender acts of God in history. In my view, Isaiah was exactly right when he speaks gentle words of tenderness to an afflicted people, a people who has suffered more than double for its sins.

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins (Isaiah 40:1-2).

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MYSTICAL-PROPHETIC THOUGHT OF WEIL AND GUTIERREZ: REFLECTIONS ON THE MYSTERY AND HIDDENNESS OF GOD

The thesis of this dissertation can be summarized as follows: Simone Weil and Gustavo Gutierrez both incorporate a prophetic sensitivity and attention to the hiddenness of God, concomitant to the experiences of suffering and the problem of evil, on the one hand, as well as a mystical vision which inspires a way of life in the face of Divine mystery, on the other. Both of these thinkers share a distrust in philosophies or theologies which place the mystical and prophetic forms of religion in binary opposition. For one, Weil and Gutierrez reveal a critical suspicion of forms of mysticism that ignore or minimize the harsh and tragic reality of suffering and violence in history; conversely, they equally castigate prophetic traditions which deny the contributions of mystical interpretations, practices and ways of speaking to and about Divine mystery. An intense awareness of the mystery, beauty and love of God is joined to a heightened awareness of power, conflict, suffering, and evil in human life. In this way, an awareness of both the mystery and hiddenness of God is central to their thought.

An emphasis on the shared characteristics of the thought of Simone Weil and

Gustavo Gutierrez cannot preclude attention to important differences, however. Insofar as they embody distinct perspectives and interpretations, therefore, this thesis contends that Simone Weil contributes a more intense and developed understanding of mysticism than Gutierrez, on the one hand, and that Gutierrez contributes a more developed and persuasive account of the prophetic tradition, on the other. This argument does not suggest that the mystical element is missing from Gutierrez nor the prophetic element from Weil. Indeed, Gutierrez and Weil make their own contributions to each tradition, especially with Gutierrez's interest in the indigenous spiritualities of 'third world' peoples and Weil's creative interpretation of Greek tragedy vis-a-vis the Christian passion narratives. In short, this thesis contends that dialogue between these thinkers can contribute a more developed and comprehensive mystical-prophetic formulation than that of either Weil or Gutierrez alone.

Points of Contact in Weil and Gutierrez

Evil is to love what mystery is to the intelligence. Just as mystery constrains the virtue of faith to be supernatural, so likewise does evil act in regard to the virtue of charity. And to try to find compensations, justifications for evil is as harmful for the cause of charity as it is to try to expound the content of the mysteries on the plane of the human intelligence (NB 340-41; GG 68).

For both Simone Weil and Gustavo Gutierrez, the mystery of God and the mystery of evil are intractable to human understanding. Attempts to prove the existence of God, for instance, are as misguided as attempts to explain and justify the presence of evil. Such attempts are potentially idolatrous for both Weil and Gutierrez insofar as they reduce God to human terms, images, metaphors (not only as rational arguments for God, but also

where culture, race, class or gender figure as privileged symbols of God). In a like manner, explanations for evil may become idols which profane the mystery of evil and the incomprehensibility of God (as with some theodicies). On the contrary, at the heart of the mystical and prophetic visions of Weil and Gutierrez is a silencing and interruption of rational explanations and theories for both God and the presence of evil. Instead, a response that loves without a why, that seeks justice without a cause is advocated by Weil and Gutierrez. The meaning of faith is defined in relation to both the mystical tradition, as a knowledge born of love, on the one hand, and in relation to the prophetic and tragic traditions, as a knowledge born of suffering. In this sense, reflection on God in the thought of Weil and Gutierrez is grounded in spiritual praxis and love and ethical-political praxis and the experience of suffering. Knowledge of the mystery and hiddenness of God is possible only through spiritual training and through struggle, suffering, even confrontation with God. The sense of Divine mystery in mysticism and Divine hiddenness in prophecy demands a contemporary theological method that is not merely informational but primarily transformational. In this picture, religious reflection has the primary task of cultivating and inspiring particular forms of life (via spiritual exercises and attention to the non-persons of history) in order to make a consciousness of God's presence possible. The path to God in this mystical-prophetic interpretation is through an entire way of life animated by acts of spirituality, love, compassion and justice.

The creative incorporation of both mystical and prophetic elements in the thought of Weil and Gutierrez seeks to do justice to the full diversity and ambiguity of human experience. Appreciation for the presence of beauty, love, joy, ecstasy in human life, on

the one hand, and an honest recognition of suffering, violence, terror, on the other, is at the heart of their thought. The sense that there is much that is attractive, alluring and beautiful to human life is combined with a feeling of exile, estrangement and terror in history and society (*mysterium et tremendum*). Concerning their interpretation of God no less, Weil and Gutierrez note a similar ambiguity. A consciousness of the tenderness and love of God is held in tension with a fearful and awesome awareness of the violence and wrath of God (divine hiddenness). Gutierrez recognizes that in the Old Testament/Hebrew bible, for instance, the dual face of God is interpreted vis-a-vis both the positive fortunes and blessings of Israel as well as the experiences of exile and oppression. Here the face of God discloses a passionate love of God for the people and an anger with, even abandonment of, Israel. Simone Weil notes that for Christians, also, the intimate relationship of Jesus of Nazareth with the Father reveals the tender face of God and, yet, it too gives way to Jesus' feeling of fear and abandonment in the face of the harsh will of the Father.

For Simone Weil, an urgent and essential task of philosophy is to illuminate, not explain, the irreducible absurdities and contradictions of the human condition (FLNB 182; NB 411-12,396). Weil interprets the contradictions between the gospel of John and the synoptic gospels as a sign of their truth not falsity (NB 416). The gospel of John expresses the sheer beauty, joy, sweetness, and love inherent to Christian life, while the synoptics emphasize the pain, struggle and anguish of the Christian vocation (WFG 83).¹

¹Differences in Christianity are also evident in terms of christology, Weil claims. John's gospel highlights the freedom and authority of Christ, who is portrayed as controlling his destiny, while the synoptics depict a more vulnerable Christ at the mercy of his destiny (NB 538).

This tension between these contradictory elements in human experience and Christian belief has led Gustavo Gutierrez to insist on both mystical and prophetic language about God. For him, at the very soul of liberation theology is the relationship between mystical language and experiences of God in a key of love, peace, and joy, on the one hand, and prophetic speech and awareness of the harsh reality of exploitation, poverty and oppression, on the other (TSMYF 17; MIC 81; OJ 16,88). While mystical language acknowledges that everything comes from the free and unmerited love of God, prophetic language denounces historical situations of injustice and despoliation. The interaction between mystical and prophetic language is meant to avoid both a spiritualistic evasion of historical responsibility and a political reductionism (OJ 16; TSMYF 57). The visions of mysticism and prophecy also remind us of the limits of objective language about God. For Gutierrez, understanding of God will emerge when we are engaged in spiritual and prophetic actions. Spiritual training and ethical-political commitment are conditions for theological reflection. They comprise the moment of silence and prayer that is indispensable for reflection on God.

In the theology of Gutierrez, an acknowledgement of God's love, though not without pain and struggle, forms the cornerstone of theology and is the crucial basis for the prophetic embrace of the poor and afflicted. The pursuit of justice in the prophetic traditions must be situated within this context of God's gratuitous love or else the pursuit of justice is easily debased into resentment and vengeance (OJ 94-96). Gutierrez suggests, then, that the synthesis of mystical and prophetic language is at the heart of his liberation theology (GL 146,162).

Prophecy and the Hiddenness of God

We have seen in this dissertation that an interpretation and struggle with the hiddenness of God is at the heart of the thought of Simone Weil and Gustavo Gutierrez. Their reading of Divine hiddenness incorporates the following positions: 1) a theology of the cross in which God's *presence* is located in the context of suffering, anguish, conflict and oppression; 2) a confrontation with God's *absence* and power in the problem of evil comes to the forefront. With daring, both Weil and Gutierrez mention the apparent split between the God of goodness and the God of power implicit in these two elements of the hidden God. With this second element of God's absence or power, an awareness of the rule of force, violence, injustice and war in history gives rise to Simone Weil's appreciation of tragedy and to Gutierrez's reading of Job. Here the struggle with God's absence or violence refuses explanation in terms of human sin or human freedom. Affliction strikes in a haphazard fashion against the will of the victims and in a profoundly unwarranted and undeserved fashion. The dialectic between these two elements of the hiddenness of God prevents Weil and Gutierrez from either an undivided repudiation of God (atheism) or from a simplistic theism. The Christian confession in the revelation of God through the figure of Christ Crucified is, no doubt, at odds with a secular atheism. On the other hand, the willingness to confront and struggle with the realities of tragic suffering and premature death in history (the apparent absence or violence of God) undermines any confident and optimistic theism. Weil and Gutierrez both maintain this dialectic in manner that refuses to surrender either element of Divine hiddenness.

Simone Weil insists that the truth of Christianity is confirmed not by the glorious or almighty face of God in Christ, but rather through the wretched, ignominious and poor face of Christ the beggar. The grandeur of the Church and Christian society fail to recognize this hidden God, this Jesus who was a common convict, shamefully tortured and put to death (FLNB 144-45). Christian society, instead, admires the grandeur of martyrs, of those who went to their death with courage and flare. But this martyrdom is far from the experience of Christ. Christ lamented his fate and pleaded for his fate to be altered. The bitterness of Christ's cross lies precisely in the fact that it is something he endured against his will (FLNB 415). At the moment of the cross, Christ feels the whole force and terror of his destiny. He feels abandoned by God and cries out to God (FLNB 26). For those who seek God in signs of wonder, power and majesty this depiction of God is a stumbling block, shameful and foolish to human reason. For others, this understanding of God is the gateway to knowledge; this theology articulates a wisdom born of suffering. Such a wisdom shatters the normal faculties of human reason and discursive thought (FLNB 483). It is a wisdom most poignantly perceived by those who themselves have endured affliction. Slaves, peasants, workers, colonized peoples, victims of violence, village idiots: such persons and groups are privy to a knowledge hidden from the wise and powerful (MA 67,70). They feel their own fragility and recognize their dependency. They are often more aware of the painful face of reality that others seek to deny with a veil of illusion or fantasy.

To be sure, Gutierrez shares this theology of the cross. For him, the cry of Jesus on the cross must permeate all of our theological efforts (OJ 103). The task before

theology is reflection on God from the garbage heaps, from the underside of history. God's face and actions are revealed on the margins of society and history. God hides his face from history and yet reveals it in the struggles and deaths of the disinherited and poor (GL 90). For Las Casas, Gutierrez shows, God is most profoundly manifested in the scourged and crucified faces of the oppressed Indians (LC 11,13,18). The cross of Christ echoes throughout history. For Gutierrez, too, a wisdom born of suffering is insinuated in this perspective. While experiences of poverty and oppression may bring premature death to the victims, suffering also communicates a knowledge accessible to the uneducated and illiterate, to women, to 'third world' peoples, and to those, as St. Paul says, of ignoble birth (1Corinthians 1-2).

In Weil and Gutierrez, this understanding of God's presence in locations of suffering and poverty is joined with an awareness of the brutal reality of force, conflict, violence and oppression in human history and society. In this sense, they turn to consider Divine absence or even the possibility of Divine violence. In certain moments of intense crisis and anguish, then, a theology of the cross gives rise to the consideration of the problem of evil. For Weil, Greek tragedy is unparalleled in unveiling the role of force and violence in human affairs. Greek tragedy exposes the bitter and destructive impact of force. It does so without diluting the brutality of force by false illusions or consolations (MA 164). Force crushes whatever is in its path, it destroys memories, identities, hope. It is a mistake to assume that force is powerless to annihilate spiritual values. Weil's consideration of force in human affairs owes much to her very concrete knowledge of violence and oppression in history. In this sense, her reflections on force

are by no means simply determined by her reading of Greek tragedy. Her encounter with exploitive work in the factory forced upon her an existential contact with violence in human affairs. This experience instilled in her an indelible awareness not only of physical suffering, but of the humiliation and degradation that results from an encounter with force. This experience, she tells us, imprinted her with the mark of a slave.

A recognition of the reality of colonialism and imperialism is also at the heart of Weil's interpretation of force in human life. As her biographers point out, even when Weil became disillusioned with some of the labor unions, she never ceased to denounce and struggle against the colonization of non-European peoples.² Her reading of history is particularly sensitive to the historical events of oppression and subjugation, where force annihilates entire communities and spiritual traditions. The narrative of conquest in the book of Joshua, the imperial policies of Rome, the violence of Christendom in the Middle Ages and during the Conquest of the Americas, or the contemporary presence of France in 'third world' countries, all received the harsh censure of Weil. Such histories of violence were all too successful in annihilating the victims in its path. Any attempt to explain such affliction and evil in terms of human sin was abhorred by Weil. Affliction does not strike its victims in a rational and ethical manner in terms of reward-punishment. Force is blind and chaotic, it is anonymous and indifferent (WFG 125,135). The reality of such violence and power in creation leads her to suggest that creation is not only being, but also non-being or void. It is the arena in which God creates, but also

²See Simone Petremont, Simone Weil: A Life trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976) 207, 325.

withdraws and renounces his presence. Creation is also cross (NB 191-92,213; FLNB 100,120).

Given this tragic reading of affliction, Weil spurns those theodicies which attempt to explain or justify evil in simple terms of human sin or freedom. The words that comprise such theodicies are no more than idolatrous subterfuges which seek to divert our attention from suffering; they are obstacles to compassion for the afflicted (NB 626-27). Indeed, the repudiation of some theodicies leads Weil to daringly challenge God. In this case, she suggests that the tender and personal God manifested in Jesus Christ is only one face of God in human experience. The more terrifying experiences in history and society provide a basis for perceiving an impersonal and indifferent face of God, one which destroys the righteous and wicked alike. Hence, metaphors of void, abyss, force, chaos are, at times, associated with God in the thought of Simone Weil. It is the wrath and violence of God that Prometheus and Jesus Christ confront (ICAG 65,67). It is against this hidden face of God that Job calls for a mediator, Weil remarks (NB 525). In these instances, Simone Weil regards the disobedience of Prometheus, Job and the cry of lament of Christ as a "divine disobedience," one inspired by an excessive love of humanity (FLNB 344).

While Weil turns in the direction of Greek tragedy, Gutierrez draws his insights from the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, together with his own experiences of suffering and oppression in the 'third world'. In both the Scriptures themselves (especially in the prophets, Job and the passion narratives) and contemporary experience, Gutierrez recognizes the dark face of human existence. In his theology, the vicious and devastating

reality of power, conflict and oppression in human history is faced without dilution. He belongs to a history of people who have suffered the effects of colonialism, capitalism and oppression. For him, the crucifixion of Christ continues through the crucifixion of entire peoples. Even poverty itself means death, he never tires of saying. While Gutierrez continues to be insistent about human responsibility for much evil, whether that be personal or structural sin, he has also turned his attention to the problem of evil and the implications of evil for our understanding of God. Along these lines, his work on the book of Job is crucial for understanding his theology. In his work on Job, his uneasiness with the reductive explanation of evil in terms of human sin is substantiated. He moves to consider and defend the protests and laments of Job, even if it may sound harsh to our ears, he says (OJ 102). Along with Job he confirms the laments of the poor and afflicted who cry out, 'How long O Lord?' Not unlike Simone Weil, he notices that the text of Job interprets God in terms of both friend and foe (OJ 65-66). For Job and the innocent sufferers of history, the face of God is not only tender and intelligible, but also violent and inscrutable. Job sees his plight (and the plight of the other innocent righteous) as the result of God's power and majesty. Job recoils in the face of the hidden God and calls out 'violence' against God (OJ 57,61). Through this encounter with his suffering, Job sees the world as void, chaos, abyss, Gutierrez notes (OJ 8,98-100). This leads Job to curse the day he was born. What is particularly extraordinary about the text of Job, Gutierrez continues, is the fact that it is Job and not Job's friends (who call for Job to repent of his sins) who speaks correctly of God (OJ 102-03). Gutierrez might say with Simone Weil, then, that there are times when a disobedience of God is divine.

To be sure, neither Weil nor Gutierrez believe that such a struggle with God leads to a confident and final repudiation of God. Their reflections on the hiddenness of God are filled with pain, anguish and struggle, but they also lay the foundation for an honest and hopeful love of God. For Weil and Gutierrez alike, the figure of Jesus Christ provides an example and response to the tragic reality of violence and injustice in human life. The cross of Christ is the location not only of the redemption of human sin, but also of the Divine embrace of human alienation and estrangement. Without furnishing an explanation for evil, the example of Christ provides the basis for compassion, a compassion that loves without a why. This response silences accusations and complaints about the ostensible sins of the afflicted. Compassion gives of itself and seeks justice while silencing blame and while renouncing the fruits of action (FLNB 94). It is the suffering, protesting and yet loving example of Christ that is the key to Weil and Gutierrez.

In the thought of Weil, the pain, emptiness and void of affliction (cross, dark night) is a moment of apprenticeship that, with proper attention, gives way to the manifestation of the divine emptiness, an emptiness that is fuller and more real than any worldly presence (NB 531,545). In this way, Simone Weil suggests that the divine emptiness or the hidden God is more real than the false gods of the world. This divine emptiness disrupts our complacency and satisfaction with the ways of the world. Not only does the hidden God come to detach us from our false gods, however; it also discloses itself in the form of gift, as an unwarranted and unexpected surprise. The Divine void reveals itself as the Good and comes to us as pure joy, grace and love. For

Weil and Gutierrez, this leads to a 'face to face' encounter with God that validates and affirms the beauty, joy and goodness of creation. It leads to an immediate and direct mystical knowledge of God that Jesus Christ possessed in an unsurpassable manner.

Mysticism and the Mystery of God

The theology of cross in Weil and Gutierrez alike, as mentioned, affirms God's presence in locations of God's seeming absence. The interruptive presence of affliction and force, however, calls into question a confident affirmation of God and raises the more troubling question of God's absence or violence. What prevents this attention to Divine hiddenness in Weil and Gutierrez from becoming an outright repudiation of God as either non-existent or evil? This dissertation has tried to show that mysticism in Weil and Gutierrez intensifies and validates a consciousness of God's presence. In this sense, the prophetic and tragic elements in their reading of the hidden God is incomplete without attention to the mystical elements in their thought. Weil and Gutierrez will insist that the mystical traditions provide invaluable resources for articulating the passionate encounter of humanity with God. An attention and awareness of God's presence--even if it is a presence that is beyond being--is confirmed through the language, practices, experiences and lives of the mystics.

In this sense, when the mystical tradition speaks of the absence of God it is often in reference to a cognitive absence. In other words, mystical or apophatic theology portrays the absence of God in a way that indicates the potential idolatry of reducing the transcendent God to a 'present' element or thing in the world. An affirmation of Divine

mystery acts to relativize and annul the tendency of language to literalize our concepts and images about God. For both Weil and Gutierrez the critique of idols is an essential moment in our path to a consciousness of the true God. Weil declares that the false gods must be demolished before the true God will manifest himself (SNLG 148,155,158). Atheism, then, can be considered as a purification, as a cleansing of our concepts and images that usually name God (GG 103). Insofar as religion is simply a source of consolation, Weil continues, it too can only benefit from a deconstructive atheism (GG 104). No doubt, for Weil, idolatry is a subtle and insidious temptation that goes beyond our concepts of God and religion; idolatry extends into many arenas of life, such as society and culture, race, class, nation, the ego.

Gutierrez as well confirms this perspective and contends that idolatry is a more serious threat than atheism (TSMYF 32; GL 48). Idolatry places human security and hope in what is other than God: in wealth, power, glory, the ego. In his prophetic reading of idolatry, Gutierrez insists that idolatry leads to the sacrifice of human lives for gain and power. In the book of Job, also, Gutierrez discovers the words and explanations of Job's friends to be forms of idolatry: their words and ideas of just retribution prevent them from being attentive to the suffering of their friend. Here the idol of theodicy prevents Job's friends from compassion, while also reducing the transcendent God to their own theories and understandings of Divine justice (OJ 75).

The mystery of God, therefore, is at the heart of the mystical thought of Weil and Gutierrez. It inspires and imbues their thought with beauty, joy and love. When the false gods are annihilated then contact with the Good beyond being is imaginable. In the

thought of Weil, contact with the Good is partially realized (in an implicit manner) through love of neighbor, love of the beauty of the world, through religious practices and friendship (WFG 137-215). Such forms of love constitute the period of preparation, when God is present but only in a veiled manner (WFG 138). When God comes in person, she continues, these loves and practices of preparation are intensified and heightened. Through such a loving adventure, God reveals him/herself and a more immediate and explicit consciousness of God is born. Ecstasy, joy and beauty overwhelms the human person and it becomes obvious that one has slept with God by the extraordinary life one leads (FLNB 146).

Gutierrez is no less insistent on the comprehensive character of the spiritual life. Christian spirituality involves a following of Christ that demands an alteration of all our ways of thinking, believing and acting; spirituality is an entire way of life (WDOW 54,81). Mystical knowledge of God, in particular, makes our faces radiant through contemplation of the holiness of God, as it did to the face of Moses (GL 31). For Christians, St. Paul argues, the veil that hides the face of Moses is removed by Christ once and for all and the glory of the Lord is made accessible to the people (2Corinthians 3:18). This makes possible a more direct and immediate knowledge of God, Gutierrez maintains (WDOW 45).

The example of Job is unparalleled for Gutierrez in illustrating the transforming impact of a human encounter with God. Job's mystical, face-to-face encounter with God brings an end to his dejected and despairing outlook. Bitterness and protest against God succumbs to a reverent love and hope in God (OJ 85-87). Job's vision of God

communicates the mysterious, alluring and beautiful face of God that his suffering had veiled. In the thought of Gutierrez, then, Christian faith is both an awareness of suffering, conflict and cross in human life, on the one hand, and a direct and immediate consciousness of God's presence, on the other. The mystical element in Christian faith validates the goodness, love and gratuitousness of God. The self-manifestation of God comes as pure gift and draws us out of ourselves (ecstasy) and into God.

We have seen that for both Weil and Gutierrez, mysticism cannot be reduced to extraordinary experiences and events. While it does not necessarily exclude such experiences, the heart of mysticism in their thought is an immediate or direct consciousness of God that is born of love. Weil contends that the mystical life is only authenticated by the entire life of the mystic. When one is pregnant and lives for the sake of others, then we will know that this soul has been united to God (FLNB 146). Far from encouraging a withdrawal and escape from history and society, mysticism in the thought of Weil and Gutierrez is the inspiration for a life lived in the midst of the world. In Weil's reading of Plato, a vision of the Good only motivates a return to the cave and a life of worldly service (like the Mahayana Buddhist *bodhisattva*) (SNLG 111-12). For Gutierrez, spirituality provides the sustenance and hope for struggle against the injustices of the world (WDOW 13-17). The fruit of mysticism in Weil and Gutierrez is, in short, a spiritual fecundity in history and society.

Finally, Weil and Gutierrez share the promotion of a form of mysticism that attends to the well-being of the entire person, body and spirit. Material concerns of bread, water, shelter, security, freedom, etc. fall within the purview of their understanding

of spirituality (their mutual appreciation of Marx deserves mention here). Indeed, they both speak of cultivating the soil for the spiritual life (NFR 6-7; LC 79). Weil names the kind of spirituality which is entirely otherworldly as a spurious mysticism (NFR 150-51). Only through concrete things and persons of this earth can we penetrate to that which lies beyond, Weil holds. The recognition of human dependency on material and spiritual conditions of life makes evident the role of necessity in human life.

Contact with necessity through the pain of work, for instance, instructs us about human limits and mortality. Workers are less likely to consider themselves autonomous masters of their lives. The worker's subjection to time and space is revealed through the burden and disgust of work (NB 79,170,301). Work is participation in cross through an acceptance of the death of the ego. With the proper attention and consent, Weil believes that work can become a spiritual exercise. When this happens an equilibrium between freedom and necessity is established; here the human person is neither slave nor master (FLNB 88-89). Consent to one's limits, to the vulnerable and mortal feature of human life gives rise to decreation and the birth of God within the soul (NFR 286). Gutierrez develops a spirituality of labor in a similar manner. The dialectic between freedom and necessity is phrased in terms of creation and cross, respectively. As a participation in creation, work is an act of creative freedom, of human cooperation with God (STH 24-26). In this sense, humanity is given the mandate of lordship over creation. In exploitive, oppressive work the human person is reduced to an inanimate object, the means rather than the end of production. A spirituality of labor seeks to reverse this perversion of means and ends and to reestablish the human person as co-author of

creation. Neither is the human person a simple master of creation for Gutierrez, however. Labor, in this sense, makes evident our dependency. It is a sharing in the cross of Christ (STH 60).

Weil and Gutierrez alike are clear that a change in the actual conditions of work is a crucial step in cultivating the soil for spirituality. Oppressive work is more likely to lead to the destruction and degradation of the human person than to a spiritual rebirth or moment of decreation. Spiritual training involves, then, the nurturing of roots and ethical-political analysis (NFR 181,207; WDW 3). In this manner, Weil and Gutierrez hope to make the mystical life accessible not only to lay people, but also to the masses of the poor, illiterate, workers, and those of the 'third world'. The privileged insights of such groups into human misfortune and the tragic beauty of the human condition places them in the position that can lead, with the proper attention and consent, to an awareness of God's gift of love even in the midst of their pain and struggles.

Points of Divergence in Weil and Gutierrez

This dissertation has tried to suggest that dialogue between Simone Weil and Gustavo Gutierrez is a rewarding task. They both regard the synthesis of the mystical and prophetic elements of religion to be at the heart of their ideas and beliefs. To be sure, there are important differences in their thought that cannot be overlooked. Indeed, the differences between Weil and Gutierrez are an important aspect of the thesis of this dissertation, namely, that the fruit of engaging these two thinkers is a more developed and complete mystical-prophetic formulation than that of either Weil or Gutierrez alone.

Insofar as they embody distinct perspectives, I believe that Simone Weil contributes a more intense and developed mystical thought, on the one hand, while Gutierrez provides an important contribution regarding the prophetic tradition.

Mysticism and the Contribution of Simone Weil

Gutierrez admits the complexity and ambiguity of the term 'spirituality.' He argues that it is important to go back to the biblical and historical resources of Christian thought to refine our understanding of spirituality (WDOW 54). For the meaning of spirituality and mysticism alike, Gutierrez provides us with a reading of these terms which are profoundly biblically based. As such his thoughts on these terms are important and accurate, but they are also limited. A study of Christian mysticism must involve an exploration of the history of Christian thought beyond biblical resources. A more exhaustive and complete study of the meaning of mysticism is still lacking in his thought, then. Since he regards spirituality and mysticism to be at the very heart of his thought, a further exploration and development of the meaning of mysticism can only refine and enrich the liberation theology of Gutierrez. It seems to me that Simone Weil provides an excellent case of someone who can enrich and refine the meaning of mysticism in the thought of Gutierrez. Exactly how does she do so?

Besides the fact that Weil claimed to have had certain transforming mystical experiences, what is quite extraordinary about Weil is the manner in which she internalizes and embodies the mystical tradition. In ways that are often unconscious she articulates and develops themes that are central to the mystical tradition in the west.

Much of this may be due to the fact that she had a profound and penetrating knowledge and love of Plato and the Platonic tradition. Without a doubt the Platonic tradition deeply influenced the development of Christian mysticism. Weil's fascination with the Platonic tradition was not limited to Plato and the mainstream Christian mystics, however; in addition, she was drawn by marginal and 'heretical' Christian Platonic groups, by spiritualities that have been almost obliterated from memory, such as the Cathars. The development of mysticism in the thought of Weil has much to do, therefore, with her attraction for Plato and the Christian Platonists. The development of her ideas of detachment, decreation, void, dark night, attention, waiting, obedience, inactive action, apophatic language of God, nuptial union, mysticism of work, etc.. owe much to the history of the interpretation of Plato and to the creative and novel reading of this tradition by Christian mystics.

Of course, it would be wrong to ignore her own autobiographical claims to mystical encounter with God. In fact, she states that God himself came down to her and possessed her during different times of physical suffering, prayer, recitation of poems and during her participation in Catholic liturgies and festivals (WFG 67-72). Also in one of her notebooks she recorded a narrative of an incident in her life, a mysterious encounter with God (FLNB 65-66).³ She tells us that the fruit of such experiences was to increase

³While I will not quote the entire text, it begins with the following description: "He came into my room and said: 'You poor wretch, who understand nothing and know nothing--come with me and I will teach you things you have no idea of.' I followed him. He took me into a church. It was new and ugly. He led me before the altar and said: 'Kneel.' I told him: 'I have not been baptized.' He said: 'Fall on your knees before this place, with love, as before the place where truth exists.' I obeyed." Weil continues that they then began to have a conversation, they broke bread and drank wine. She concludes with the following words: "Sometimes I cannot prevent myself from repeating, in fear and compunction, a little of what he said to me. How am I to know if I remember it correctly? He is not there to tell me. I well know that he doesn't love me. How could he love me? And yet there is something deep in me, some point of myself, which cannot prevent itself from

her love of God and Christ. In fact, she exclaimed that she loved God, Christ, and the Catholic faith, especially the Catholic mystics, the Catholic liturgy, hymns, architecture, and rites "as much as it is possible for so miserably inadequate of creature to love them" (WFG 49). Simone Weil is, indeed, an exemplary Christian mystic. The intensity and radical nature of her mystical thought is both enigmatic and alluring. Her actual thought as well as her person contributes much to a contemporary interpretation of the heritage of mysticism.

Since we have focused on the mystical thought of Weil, however, it is important to briefly summarize some of the issues we have discussed. In her essay "God in Plato," Weil summarizes what she considers generations of mysticism (SNLG 111). In her reading of the Plato's cave metaphor in *The Republic*, she notes that the beginning of the mystical life is, first and foremost, a recognition of our life in the cave; that is, a recognition that we are born in illusion and falsehood, in a situation that she names original sin (SNLG 108-09). In this situation, knowledge of our misery, of our exile and imprisonment is concealed from us. The beginning of the mystical life is, then, the perception that this world is not everything and that we must seek the Good elsewhere. Such a consciousness of the void then leads to a spiritual training in detachment. Detachment from the attractions of wealth, power, fame, worldly wisdom and the passions brings pain and anguish. Here spiritual nakedness and death to the world is the result of this voiding and emptying of worldly attachments. At this level the will is employed to the point of exhaustion (FLNB 326). Following this stage, the voiding of the idols of the

thinking, with fear and trembling, that perhaps, in spite of everything, he does love me" (FLNB 65-66).

world is joined to a voiding of conceptual and imaginative idols as well as experiential idols. Our intellect and trust in certain experiences must also be exhausted. Even our conceptions of God and religion must be purified of false concepts and images. Weil interprets this moment of the void as an apophatic critique of speech about God as well as a critique of the tendency to ascribe truth to positive experiences of religion, such as consolation, miracles and belief in eternal life. A final moment of this training in the void is the actual experience of affliction or 'dark night.' In this state, one feels a loss of memory, hope, even a loss of God. An awareness of our nothingness, our fragility and finitude is almost unavoidable here. With the proper attention, decreation occurs and we are assimilated to God, not by a recognition of our likeness to God, but by a consciousness of our misery (NB 120,236). Weil interprets human labor as a concrete practice of this moment of detachment and experience of the void and 'dark night.'

These elements of the void are the means of escaping from the cave and coming into the light. Once one is outside of the cave, a vision of the sun, the supreme Good, stuns the recipient. Weil contends that the vision of the Good corresponds to spiritual marriage with God (SNLG 111). The ability to contemplate the Good, however, is dependent upon the faculty of attention. The dialectical moments of the process of detachment and decreation (a recognition of our nothingness) is a condition for an analogical moment in which an awareness and consciousness of the Good is born. For Plato, Weil says, this involves a training in attention of an intellectual, aesthetical and ethical nature. This element of training is only the condition for the ascent, however, it is not the elevating force (SNLG 157). At the heart of the ascension is God's gift of

grace. The wings by which we ascend grow only through passion, through a state akin to falling in love (SNLG 118). The beauty and love of God suddenly comes upon the recipient, it shocks and transforms her. Memory is roused and an awareness of our origin and destiny emerges. It is this passive moment in this spiritual journey, the moment where desire and not will nor intellect is effective, that proves that this is truly a mysticism, Weil concludes (SNLG 127).⁴ Spiritual exercises may prepare for God's presence, but only desire draws God down (WFG 111). For Weil, this moment of manifestation occurs through visible means: by an icon, image, structure, or physical form. Salvation occurs through a contemplative process of looking (not eating) (WFG 193).

In a Christian manner, Weil insists that this process of ascension is not the final moment in the mystical life: an imitation of the descent of Jesus Christ into human form must follow the vision of God. Activity in the world is only intensified. The transformed person is one with God as the just person is one with Justice. Acts of charity flow freely from the pregnant and virgin soul, one loves and gives without a why (FLNB 146-49). For Weil 'inactive action' calls to mind the passivity and detachment of the individual ego and will. Renunciation of one's motives and fruits of action are performed while remaining active in the pursuit of justice and well-being for others. Acts of charity are performed entirely for the sake of another. Compassion for another person even

⁴In the mystical vision of Bonaventure, the seventh day of rest is also a stage in which union with God occurs through "grace not instruction, desire not understanding, the groaning of prayer not diligent reading, the Spouse not the teacher, God not man, darkness not clarity, not light but the fire that totally inflames and carries us into God by ecstatic unctious and burning affections" (See The Soul's Journey Into God, Chapter 7.6, trans. Ewert Cousins (New York: Paulist Press, 1978) 115).

dispenses with the need to act 'for God' (WFG 151,178). In short, the decreated person is no longer himself. The ecstatic grace of love displaces the ego and replaces it with Christ.

Prophecy and the Contribution of Gutierrez

Needless to say, the interpretation of the prophetic tradition in Gutierrez owes much to the Old Testament or Hebrew bible. In addition to a theology of the cross, the vision of the classic prophets is at the center of Gutierrez's liberation theology. As we have seen, this element in the thought of Gutierrez accounts for his attention to the revelation of God in concrete history. For the prophets, God is hidden in history and only recognizable in what is insignificant and unassuming, in the underside of history (GL 80). Nevertheless, for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, God is indeed revealed in the midst of the conflictual events of history. Thus, while the prophets manifest an extraordinary sensitivity to the dark and destructive face of history (historical experiences of oppression, slavery, exile), they also deem history to be the arena of God's saving acts. The eschatological element in the prophets is the basis for a sense of hope in history. Gutierrez clearly shares this hope in history and belief in (chastened) progress (GL 93). Simone Weil, on the other hand, is far more skeptical and pessimistic about historical progress than Gutierrez. We have seen that Simone Weil's contribution to our understanding of prophecy is her creative and persuasive reading of Greek tragedy vis-a-vis the Christian passion narratives. Her thoughts on the Old Testament/Hebrew bible, however, leave much to be desired and, more than such a deficiency, they are often

prejudicial and shallow. It is precisely this fault in Weil that leads to the eclipse of the prophetic tradition at the hands of tragedy. In this sense, her reading of history is not only pessimistic, but at times fatalistic.

In his book *The Hidden God* Lucien Goldmann argues that the difference between dialectical thought and tragedy concerns, in part, their view of history. While dialectical thought contends that values and meaning can become incarnate in the real world of historical experience, tragic thought eliminates this possibility from history and places it in eternity.⁵ In the tragic vision, the highest moment of redemption is an enlightened awareness and willing acceptance of human limits and the realities of suffering and death, while redemption in the prophetic tradition arouses a hope that the transformation and liberation of human bondage can occur even here and now, in the midst of real history.⁶ With this broad distinction in mind, we might say that Simone Weil is closer to tragedy and Gustavo Gutierrez closer to dialectical thought.

Simone Weil often opposes history to the Good and contends that history is devoid of Good. Instead, history is the arena of force and violence. For Weil, the Hebrew bible makes temporal promises and by doing so it only affirms and perpetuates conquest and domination in history (NB 570). Christianity as well is guilty of trying to discover final meaning and continuity within history. This is the problem with Hegel and Marx, she notes (NB 616; FLNB 308). She opposes this view of history to the timeless, eternal hope of the Good beyond history, intimated in the experience of beauty, love or mystical

⁵See Lucien Goldmann, *The Hidden God: A Study of Tragic Vision in the Pensees of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964) 59.

⁶ibid. 81.

union with God.⁷ In this reading, mystical religious traditions are aware of force, but repudiate force and trust in historical progress along with it. Redemption is eternal not historical. For these reasons, she is very critical of eschatology and apocalypticism. For her, eschatology confuses the Good with history; belief in the coming of God within history is an illusion which only fosters and promotes the will-to-power and rule of history. For Weil, it is this illusion which is responsible for Israel's violence against its enemies, for Rome's subjugation of nations, for Christendom's persecution of 'heretics,' 'infidels' and non-Christians. For Weil, either one renounces the will-to-power in history for a timeless and eternal Good, or else one risks debasing the Good into an idol of conquest and military victory. "One's attitude was bound to be different according to whether one believed that the revelation referred to some approaching and general event, or to transcendent and eternal truths..." (NB 353; also NB 350; FLNB 216; NFR 219).⁸

It should not be surprising at this point to mention that Gutierrez is far more orthodox and hopeful about Jewish and Christians notions of history. He defends and

⁷Weil's censure of religious traditions which look for God's promises within time and history, she believes, is the opposite of mystical religions which are concerned with eternity, as with the Egyptians (NB 570). Her romantic and bizarre reading of the Egyptians contends that they were the author of a pure religious tradition that repudiated force and dominance in history. No mention is ever made of their brutal exploitation and oppression of Israel--a strange oversight!

⁸It might seem that these ideas of Weil are at odds and in contradiction with other elements of her prophetic thought (i.e., her consistent affirmation that it is only through and within history that we can pierce through to eternity). They are indeed. Dying at an early age prevented Weil from reexamining her unsystematic reflections. She never had the time to completely consider points of ambiguity or contradiction. Even if Weil would have shunned the idea of a system, we could have still hoped for a more consistent elaboration of her thoughts.

advances the eschatological elements in Judaism and Christianity. For him, far from leading to the conquest and domination of history, eschatology is the interruptive event and word of God in history laying the foundation for justice, peace and love. The eschatological promises of God subvert human complacency and apathy concerning history and announce good news for the poor and oppressed *even here and now* (TL 160-68). The kingdom of God inaugurates a new covenant in which Good and justice will take root in history in a proleptic manner. The eschatological promises of God begin to flourish when the kingdom of peace and justice always/already enlivens the temporal, earthly and social existence of humanity. In this sense, Gutierrez argues that while they cannot be identified, temporal progress and the kingdom of God are related (TL 171).

Again, while I consider the bias of Simone Weil concerning the Jewish prophetic tradition a serious fault which impoverishes her interpretation of the prophetic tradition, in a way it is also a strength insofar as it leads to a creative and perspicacious reading of the prophetic tradition in relation to Greek tragedy. In the Christian passion narratives she detects an awareness of the disturbing reality of violence and suffering in human history akin to the representation of the dark face of human life in Greek tragedy. On his side, Gustavo Gutierrez adds an invaluable contribution by considering the Old Testament narrative of Exodus, the Psalms, the prophets and Job in a manner that creatively illuminates his own situation of oppression and poverty in the 'third world'. Concerns with the destructive presence of evil steer Gutierrez to engage the issue of theodicy in a way that has affinities with the tragic vision. Nevertheless, Gutierrez's profound and resolute hope in human history deserves the attribution of the title 'prophetic' rather than

'tragic'. With Simone Weil, on the other hand, it is the tragic tradition which is more dominant in her thought, even if the prophetic vision is far from absent. Her thoughts on work, her theology of the cross, her insistence on action and commitment in history and society, and even her reading of mysticism justify the claim that Weil is a 'prophetic-tragic' thinker. Even if her historical pessimism draws her closer to tragedy, it does not entirely eliminate the prophetic tradition. Nor does her tragic vision suggest that Weil is a pessimistic thinker as a whole; as we have seen in chapter five, it does not follow from tragedy's historical pessimism that the tragic vision as a whole is pessimistic. Weil's mystical thought (allied with her theological aesthetics) affirms the redemptive hope and joy of God's love. Her trust in the gift of grace inspires and fills her with the faith-filled confidence that God is love, beauty and good before God is power.

Conclusions

This dissertation has tried to demonstrate the benefits and possibilities of reading Simone Weil and Gustavo Gutierrez together. I have suggested that these thinkers share a concern with uniting the mystical and prophetic elements of religion. Prophetic engagement and commitment to the poor and marginalized of history is inspired by a mystical vision. Their interpretation of God combines both an attention to Divine hiddenness (a theology of the cross and confrontation with the problem of evil), on the one hand, and a consciousness of Divine mystery (the cognitive absence or transcendence of God), on the other. Their mutual accounts of mysticism insist that an awareness of the mystery and beauty of God cannot preclude an awareness of the dark and destructive

reality of suffering and evil in history and society. Indeed, for Weil and Gutierrez, knowledge and contact with God is not only a sweet and joyful experience, but one that is realized through suffering. Any form of mysticism which diverts our attention from suffering and death in history, and the wisdom that such suffering may engender, is considered by them a spurious mysticism. Optimistic and a-historical accounts of mysticism are rejected. Weil and Gutierrez both conclude that true mysticism involves, not merely extraordinary experiences or states, but a knowledge of God born of love that leads to a new life of service and devotion. The new consciousness of God instigates a conversion that reorders one's life in accord with neighbor and in harmony with the cosmos and the beauty of the world. Participation in the whole is manifested through the gratuitous love of the Logos.

Since there are important differences in the thought of Simone Weil and Gustavo Gutierrez, the second element of this thesis contends that Weil's development of the mystical tradition contributes to Gutierrez's understanding of mysticism, while Gutierrez's interpretation of the prophetic tradition corrects and contributes to Weil's understanding of prophecy. The development of mysticism in the life and thought of Weil is intense and extraordinary. She incarnates and exemplifies aspects of the mystical tradition in a creative manner. Her thoughts on Plato, the Christian Platonists and her concrete reflections on attention, decreation, obedience, waiting, love without a why, etc.. can only enrich the thought of Gutierrez. On the other hand, Gutierrez corrects Weil's tendentious and shallow reading of the Old Testament/Hebrew bible. His retrieval of Jewish resources is important in rectifying Weil's (sometimes inordinate) admiration for the

Greeks. Nevertheless, this dissertation has also argued that Weil adds an important perspective in her interpretation of prophecy vis-a-vis Greek tragedy. The fruit of this dissertation contributes to a more developed and complete mystical-prophetic formulation than that of either Weil or Gutierrez alone. If this dissertation succeeds in persuading the reader that the thought and lives of Simone Weil and Gustavo Gutierrez are at all provocative, creative and alluring then the task of this work will be accomplished.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works by Gustavo Gutierrez

- Beber En Su Propio Pozo* (Lima: Centro De Estudios Y Publicaciones (CEP), 1983).
Translated by Matthew J. O'Connell as *We Drink From Our Own Wells* (New York: Orbis Books, 1984).
- "El Evangelio del Trabajo" in *Sobre El Trabajo Humano* ed. Gustavo Gutierrez et.al.,
(Lima: CEP, 1982).
- En Busca de los Pobres de Jesucristo* (Lima: CEP, 1992). Translated by Robert Barr as
Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ (New York: Orbis Books, 1993).
- Entre Las Calandrias: En Ensayo Sobre Jose Maria Arguedas* (Lima: CEP, 1990).
- "From Exclusion to Discipleship" in *Mysticism and Institutional Crisis* eds. Christian
Duquoc and Gustavo Gutierrez (*Concilium*, 1994/4).
- Hablar De Dios Desde El Sufrimiento Del Inocente* (Lima: CEP, 1986). Translated by
Matthew J. O'Connell as *On Job* (New York: Orbis Books, 1987).
- El Dios De La Vida* (Lima: CEP, 1989). Translated by Matthew J. O'Connell as *The God
of Life* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991).
- La Fuerza Historica de los Pobres* (Lima: CEP, 1979). Translated by Robert R. Barr as
The Power of the Poor in History (New York: Orbis Books, 1983).
- La Verdad los Hara Libres: Confrontaciones* (Lima: CEP, 1986). Translated by Matthew
J. O'Connell as *The Truth Shall Make You Free* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990).
- Liberation and Change*, with Richard Shaull (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977).
- "Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith" in *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America* ed.
Gibellini (New York: Orbis Books, 1978).
- "Liberation, Theology and Proclamation" in *The Mystical and Political Dimensions of the
Christian Faith* eds. Claude Geffre and Gustavo Gutierrez (*Concilium* 96/1974).
- Teologia de la Liberacion: Perspectivas* (Lima: CEP, 1971). Translated by Caridad Inda
and John Eagleson as *A Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1973).
- "Two Theological Perspectives: Liberation Theology and Progressivist Theology" in *The
Emergent Gospel* eds. Torres and Fabella (New York: Orbis Books, 1978).

Works by Simone Weil

Attente de Dieu (Paris: La Colombe, 1950). Translated by Emma Craufurd as *Waiting For God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951).

Cahiers, 3 Volumes (Paris: Plon, 1956). Translated by Arthur Wills as *The Notebooks of Simone Weil*, 2 Volumes (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956).

Eschris de Londres et dernieres lettres (Paris: Gallimard, 1957).

Eschris historiques et politiques (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).

Formative Writings: 1929-1941 eds. Dorothy Tuck McFarland and Wilhelmina Van Ness (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987).

Intuitions prechretiennes (Paris: La Colombe, 1951). Translated by Emma Craufurd as *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1987).

La Condition ouvriere (Paris: Gallimard, 1951).

La Connaissance surnaturelle (Paris: Gallimard, 1950). Translated by Richard Rees in *The First and Last Notebooks* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

La Pesanteur et la grace (Paris: Plon, 1947). Translated by Emma Craufurd as *Gravity and Grace* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1987).

La Source grecque (Paris: Gallimard, 1953). Translated by Emma Craufurd as *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1987).

Lecons de philosophie de Simone Weil ed. A. Reynaud (Paris: Plon, 1959). Translated by Hugh Price as *Lectures On Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

L'Enracinement. Prelude a une declaration des devoirs envers l'etre humain (Paris: Gallimard, 1949). Translated by Arthur Wills as *The Need For Roots* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1987).

Lettre a un religieux (Paris: Gallimard, 1951). Translated by Arthur Wills as *Letter to a Priest* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953).

Oppression et liberte (Paris: Gallimard, 1955). Translated by Arthur Wills and John Petrie as *Oppression and Liberty* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1973).

Pensees sans ordre concernant l'amour de Dieu (Paris: Gallimard, 1962). Translated by Richard Rees in *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).

Selected Essays trans. Richard Rees (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

Simone Weil: An Anthology trans. Sian Miles (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1986).

The Simone Weil Reader ed. George Panichas (New York: Moyer Bell Limited, 1977).

Simone Weil: Seventy Letters trans. Richard Rees (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

Other Works Consulted

Aeschylus. *The Oresteia* trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

_____. *Prometheus Bound* trans. David Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

Allen, Diogenes and Eric O. Springstead. *Spirit, Nature, and Community: Issues in the Thought of Simone Weil* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994).

Augustine. *On Christian Doctrine* trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr. (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1958).

Balthasar, Hans Urs Von. *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Volume 1, Seeing the Form* trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982).

_____. *Explorations in Theology: The Word Made Flesh, Volume 1* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989).

Barth, Karl. *The Epistle to the Romans* trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).

Bell, Richard ed. *Simone Weil's Philosophy of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations* ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York:

- Shocken Books, 1968).
- Bernard of Clairvaux. *On Loving God* in *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works* trans. G.R. Evans (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).
- Blenkinsopp, Joseph. *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983).
- Blumenberg, Hans. *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983).
- Bonaventure. *The Soul's Journey Into God* in *Bonaventure* trans. Ewert Cousins (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).
- Blum, Lawrence and Seidler, Victor. *A Truer Liberty: Simone Weil and Marxism* (London: Routledge Press, 1989).
- Brueck, Katherine. *The Redemption of Tragedy: The Literary Vision of Simone Weil* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995).
- Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).
- Cabaud, Jacques. *Simone Weil* (New York: Channel Press, 1964).
- Carr, Anne. *A Search for Wisdom and Spirit: Thomas Merton's Theology of the Self* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1988).
- Certeau, Michel de. *The Mystic Fable, Volume 1, The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* trans. Michael Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- _____. *The Practice of Everyday Life* trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California, 1984).
- Cohen, Arthur. *The Tremendum* (New York: Continuum, 1993).
- Collins, John. *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).
- Cross, Frank Moore. *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973).
- Davy, M.M. *The Mysticism of Simone Weil* trans. Cynthia Rowland (London: Rockliff Publishing, 1951).
- Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx* trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

- Dupre, Louis. "Mysticism" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Volume 10, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987).
- . "Unio Mystica: The State and the Experience" in *Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: An Ecumenical Dialogue* eds. Moshe Idel and Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1996).
- Farley, Wendy. *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy* (Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990).
- Fiori, Gabriella. *Simone Weil: An Intellectual Biography* trans. Joseph Berrigan (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989).
- Fishbane, Michael. "Biblical Prophecy as a Religious Phenomenon" in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible Through the Middle Ages* ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad, 1994).
- Friedman, Richard Elliot. *The Hidden Face of God: A Divine Mystery* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1995).
- Gerrish, B.A. *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
- Goldmann, Lucien. *The Hidden God: A Study of Tragic Vision in the Pensees of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964).
- Grant, Robert with David Tracy. *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).
- Gregory of Nyssa. *The Life of Moses in Gregory of Nyssa* trans. Abraham Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).
- Hadot, Pierre. *Philosophy as a Way of Life* trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995).
- . *Plotinus or The Simplicity of Vision* trans. Michael Chase (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- Hegel. *Hegel On Tragedy* eds, Anne Paolucci and Henry Paolucci (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time* trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

- Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Prophets, Volume 1* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).
- Horsley, Richard with John Hanson. *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs* (New York: Harper Collins, 1985).
- Hugel, Baron von. *The Mystical Element of Religion, Volume 2* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1908).
- Jay, Martin. *The Dialectic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).
- John of the Cross. *The Dark Night and The Ascent of Mount Carmel in John of the Cross: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).
- Katz, Steven ed. *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).
- Kierkegaard, Soren. *Practice in Christianity* trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).
- Kolakowski, Leszek. *Main Currents of Marxism, Volume 1, The Founders* trans. P.S. Falla (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).
- Levenson, Jon. *Sinai and Zion* (New York: Harper Collins, 1985).
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).
- _____. *The Levinas Reader* ed. Sean Hand (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1989).
- Little, J.P. *Waiting On Truth* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1988).
- Louth, Andrew. *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).
- Luther, Martin. *Lectures On Isaiah, Chapters 1-39 in Luther's Works, Volume 16* ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. Herbert Bouman (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969).
- _____. *Bondage of the Will in Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings* ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor Books, 1962).
- Marguerite of Porete. *The Mirror of Simple of Souls in Marguerite of Porete* trans. Ellen Babinsky (New York: Paulist Press, 1993).
- Marion, Jean-Luc. *God Without Being* trans. Thomas Carlson (Chicago: University of

- Chicago Press, 1991).
- Mays, James Luther and Achtemeier, Paul eds. *Interpreting the Prophets* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).
- McGinn, Bernard *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).
- _____. *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great Through the Twelfth Century* (New York: Crossroad, 1994).
- _____. *The Anti-Christ: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994).
- _____. "The Letter and the Spirit: Spirituality as an Academic Discipline" in *Christian Spirituality Bulletin: Journal of the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality*, Volume 1, Number 2 (Fall 1993).
- McLellan, David. *Utopian Pessimist: The Life and Thought of Simone Weil* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1990).
- Meister Eckhart. Selected Sermons and Commentaries in *Meister Eckhart* trans. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1981).
- Metz, Johann Baptist. *Faith in History and Society* trans. David Smith (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980).
- Monk, Ray. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).
- _____. *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ* trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1968).
- Nevin, Thomas. *Simone Weil: Portrait of a Self-Exiled Jew* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991).
- Oberman, Heiko. *The Dawn of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: T.andT. Clark, 1986).
- _____. *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).
- Origen. *Commentary On the Song of Songs* in *Origen* trans. Rowan Greer (New York:

- Paulist Press, 1979).
- Ozment, Steven. *The Age of Reform: 1250-1550* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).
- Pascal, Blaise. *Pensees* trans. A.J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin Books, 1966).
- Perrin, J.B. and Thibon, G. *Simone Weil As We Knew Her* trans. Emma Craufurd (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Press, 1953).
- Petremont, Simone. *Simone Weil: A Life* trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976).
- Plato. *The Republic* and *The Symposium* trans. B. Jowett (New York: Anchor Books, 1973).
- Pseudo-Dionysius. *The Divine Names, The Celestial Hierarchy, and The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* in *Pseudo-Dionysius* trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).
- Ricoeur, Paul. *The Symbolism of Evil* trans. E. Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967).
- Ruprecht, Louis. *Tragic Posture and Tragic Vision* (New York: Continuum, 1994).
- Segundo, Juan Luis. *The Christ of the Ignatian Exercises* trans. John Drury (New York: Orbis Books, 1987).
- Sells, Michael. *Mystical Languages of Unsayng* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- Smalley, Beryl. *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1964).
- Sobrinho, Jon. *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward a Political Holiness* trans. Robert Barr (New York: Orbis Books, 1988).
- Springstead, Eric. *Christus Mediator: Platonic Mediation in the Thought of Simone Weil* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983).
- Steiner, George. *Martin Heidegger* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989).
- Tracy, David. *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

- _____. *Blessed Rage For Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- _____. *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1990).
- _____. *On Naming the Present: God, Hermeneutics, Church* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994).
- _____. *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- _____. "The Hidden God: The Divine Other of Liberation" in *Cross Currents: The Journal of the Association for Religion and Intellectual Life*, Volume 46, Number 1 (Spring 1996).
- _____. "Literary Theory and Return of the Forms for Naming and Thinking God in Theology" in *The Journal of Religion*, Volume 74, Number 3 (July 1994).
- _____. "On the Origins of Philosophy of Religion: The Need for a New Narrative of Its Founding" in *Myth and Philosophy* ed. Frank Reynolds and David Tracy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).
- Turner, Denys. *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- Veto, Miklos. *The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil* trans. Joan Dargan (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994).
- West, Cornel. *Prophecy Deliverance!* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982).
- Weisel, Elie. *Souls On Fire* (New York: Random House, 1972).
- Williams, Bernard. *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
- Wilson, Robert. *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).
- Winch, Peter. *Simone Weil: The Just Balance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Culture and Value* trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).