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Comparative Study of *Waiting for God* by Simone Weil and *Contemplative Prayer* by Thomas Merton

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The French philosopher and social critic, Simone Weil (1909-43), is now considered among the most influential thinkers and spiritual writers of the twentieth century. The Cistercian monk, Thomas Merton (1915-68), is one of the most significant figures in twentieth-century American Catholicism.[1]

This paper compares and contrasts Merton's *Contemplative Prayer* (1969)[2] and Weil's *Waiting for God* (1951) in terms of the spiritual approach of each author and their texts' relevance to the study of Christian spirituality today. The comparison and contrast uses five characteristics for the approach to spirituality and four features for the relevance to Christian spirituality today. In each aspect, Weil's writing is considered first, followed by a comparison or contrast with Merton.

Approach to Spirituality

The spiritual approach of Weil and Merton may be considered thematically as follows: style of spiritual writing, subject of suffering, necessity of grace, silence in prayer, as well as action and contemplation.

Style of Spiritual Writing

Weil's testimonies and confessions, on the one hand, are direct and appealing to read.[3] On the other hand, her approach to spirituality in writing is characterized by three devices: use of paradox, contradictory statements, and exposition by myth.[4]

An example of paradox follows:

> He who gives bread to the famished sufferer for the love of God will not be thanked by Christ. He has already had his reward in this thought itself. Christ thanks those who do not know to whom they are giving food.[5]

Second, a contradictory statement may be illustrated in her approach to the existence of God:

> A case of contradictories, both of them true. There is a God. There is no God. Where is the problem? I am quite sure that there is a God in the sense that I am sure my love is no illusion. I am quite sure there is no God, in the sense that I am sure there is nothing which resembles what I can conceive when I say that word. . . .[6]

Third, expounding by myth is seen in her teaching about the nature of grace when she refers to the tailor in Grimm's fairy tale, who proves better than a giant in a throwing contest by hurling a bird into the air instead of a stone.[7]

Moreover, Weil draws on images or metaphors in expressing her spirituality. The categories of her key images are listed by Fiedler as: eating, looking, and walking toward; gravity (*pesanteur*) and light; slavery, nudity, poverty, and de-creation."[8]

By contrast, Merton's writing is more unified in thought than Weil's writing. Harris comments that "it is no exaggeration to say that contemplation was the explicit theme of everything Merton wrote."[9] *Contemplative Prayer* is an essay on the nature of prayer, written in a more general manner. His book is a helpful resource for living a life of prayerful reflection. It shows the nature and importance of contemplative prayer for people desiring a calm heart and clear mind amidst the pressures of daily life. Lastly, Merton does not write at an overly theoretical level – his book is filled with practical principles.

While Merton writes much *about* prayer, he writes little about *how* he prayed – in other words, he gives no step-by-step method.[10] His refusal to suggest a description of the techniques of contemplative prayer encourages seekers to discover their own ways of maintaining a contemplative spirit amidst the stresses of modern living. Finally, in *Contemplative Prayer*, Merton does not tend to use metaphorical language.[11]

Topic of Suffering

In Weil's *Waiting for God,* suffering is addressed – understandably so because of the era of suffering in which she lived. Her short lifespan of 34 years was overshadowed by the First World War, the deprivations of the Depression, and the Second World War. Then, too, she suffered from poor health herself. In such a period of little peace and much suffering, Weil was driven to understand the spirituality of suffering. In commenting about suffering in her writing, Russell offers this commentary:

> Affliction for Weil was something that affected those souls who were closest to spiritual growth – the realization of suffering was therefore part of the path of God's love . . . So in her analysis of suffering, Weil was both urging us to try to see the world from the point of view of the oppressed, poor, and miserable (a message that echoes the sayings of Jesus) and also arguing that affliction was in itself a spiritual opening.[12]

By contrast, in Merton's *Contemplative Prayer,* suffering is mentioned less (also he did not personally suffer from physical affliction as Weil did). Nonetheless, he recognizes a built-in and ever-present need, or desire, that springs from human finitude.[13] Accordingly, in Merton's view, whatever fosters a fresh sense of one's finitude is worthwhile. This may entail suffering which can be seen as the deepest form of prayer. In this context, Steere notes that perhaps Merton's "deepest insight of all is that self-chosen sacrifices are nearly always inferior to those unasked-for ones which the situation throws in our way."[14]

Necessity of Grace

The role of grace for Weil is understood when she states toward the end of her life: "I may say that never at any moment in my life have I 'sought for God.'"[15] Rather, she had been waiting all the time. The title of her collection of letters and essays, *Waiting for God*, befits the theme of grace. Furthermore, in her meditation essay on the *Pater Noster* she writes that "we cannot take a single step toward him."[16] While a person can turn their eyes toward God, "it is for him to search for us."[17] Finally, in showing Weil's understanding of the necessity of grace, Fiedler writes that Weil considers the truth most essential to our salvation to be, "it is God who seeks man."[18]

Similarly, Merton also understood how one is completely dependent on God's providential care and in dire need of the gift of grace. For him, true contemplation was a theological grace, not just a psychological exercise. In other words, "in the spiritual life there are no tricks and no short cuts."[19] In looking for special gimmicks to apply, one may actually ignore God's will and his grace.[20] Moreover, Merton also states that prayer may involve waiting patiently for the time of grace, especially in times of hardship or aridity in prayer.[21] At other times, one may simply have to be led "under the secret guidance of grace."[22] Nonetheless, he also acknowledges the need for effort that is "*enlightened*, *well-directed* and *sustained*."[23] In sum, both the right use of effort and God's grace are involved.

Silence in Prayer

In *Waiting for God*, Weil touches on contemplative prayer when she refers to silence in prayer and the need for attention. She writes:

> Prayer consists of attention. It is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable toward God. The quality of the attention counts for much in the quality of the prayer. Warmth of heart cannot make up for it.[24]

Merton likewise refers to silence and attention. He mentions the "prayer of silence, simplicity, contemplative and meditative unity, a deep personal integration in an attentive, watchful listening of 'the heart'."[25] Merton intentionally states that in contemplative prayer one should *not* look for a method or system – rather one ought to develop an attitude or outlook of "faith, openness, attention, reverence, expectation, supplication, trust, joy."[26] To establish the value of silence, and receptive attention to the working of the Holy Spirit within, Merton argues that discursive acts, logical reasoning, active imagining, and stirring up of affections only conflict with silence.[27]

Action and Contemplation

Far from being a cloistered saint, Weil clearly saw her obligation "to show the public the possibility of a truly incarnated Christianity."[28] She is known for her political activism, identifying with the oppressed and with justice issues.[29] In advocating empathy with those more wretched than ourselves, she intertwines politics and spirituality in her thinking.[30]

Interestingly, she had "the Christian idea of love for one's neighbour" from her earliest childhood, to which she gave the name of justice.[31] Later, as she worked in the Renault factory, she wrote that "the affliction of others entered into my flesh and soul."[32]

Similarly, Merton emphasized the interconnection of contemplation and the love of others:

> Even when we come to live a contemplative life, the love of others and openness to others remain, as in the active life, the condition for a living and fruitful inner life of thought and love. The love of others is a stimulus to interior life, not a danger to it, as some mistakenly believe.[33]

He cautions dedicated believers, however, to avoid becoming absorbed only with their personal lives, to the point where their contemplative prayer is solely focused on *themselves*.[34]

Relevance to Christian Spirituality Today

Even though *Waiting for God* was published in 1951 and *Contemplative Prayer* in 1969, both works speak to today's postmodern audience in which freedom of thought, openness and honesty, the tension between religion and spirituality, and an interfaith outlook are valued.

Freedom of Thought

Weil freely expresses her thoughts in a manner that is often non-conventional for Christians and challenges their thinking. Her use of contradictions aids in this, where truth may be momentarily "turned on its head". Additionally, Fiedler comments that she "speaks of the problems of belief in the vocabulary of the unbeliever, of the doctrines of the Church in the words of the unchurched."[35]

Furthermore, her freedom of thought allowed her to experience the Divine speaking to her in other forms of expression, rather than only through religious writing. With this, the modern seeker would identify. An example is her reading of the English metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century. A poem by George Herbert, entitled "Love", particularly impressed her to the point that she learnt it by heart, and the recitation of it had "the virtue of a prayer" for her.[36]

Merton, likewise, writes with freedom of expression, unhindered by stereotypical thinking. (One may suggest, however, that since Merton does not have a philosophy background as Weil does, he does not employ such literary devices as paradox, contradiction, and myth.) An example of Merton's free thinking is his description of the faithful Christian. Such a believer, even though they have seriously sought God, responded conscientiously to the tasks of life, and done what is expected, may still experience acute emptiness and the feeling of being an unprofitable servant.[37] Bochen notes that Merton himself had observed that every book he had written was freely a mirror of his own character and conscience.[38]

Another instance of writing freely, being unafraid of the perceptions of others, is Merton's description of a pseudo form of contemplative prayer. One does not become a contemplative, he writes, by simply "blacking out" realities of the senses and remaining alone with oneself in darkness.[39] He states:

> One who does this of set purpose, as a conclusion to practical reasoning on the subject and without an interior vocation, simply enters into an artificial darkness of his own making. He is not alone with God, but alone with himself. He is not in the presence of the Transcendent One, but of an idol: his own complacent identity. He becomes immersed and lost in himself, in a state of inert, primitive and infantile narcissism . . . It is purely the nothingness of a finite being left to himself and absorbed in his own triviality.[40]

Openness and Honesty

Weil endears her readers through "the authenticity and directness of her witness to the truth."[41] She openly expresses her spiritual pursuit. In describing her visit to the chapel in Assisi, where Saint Francis prayed, she shares what must have been a deeply personal experience (at her age of 28 years): ". . . something stronger than I was compelled me for the first time in my life to go down on my knees."[42] Another example is her description of mystical experience which was also a deeply personal encounter. During one of her recitations of Herbert's poem,"Love", she writes that "Christ himself came down and took possession of me."[43] Later, in reciting the "Our Father", or at other moments, she shares that "Christ is present with me in person, but his presence is infinitely more real, more moving, more clear than on that first occasion when he took possession of me."[44]

Equally important is Weil's utter honesty. In a letter to Father Perrin entitled "Spiritual Autobiography", Weil writes that "I have an extremely severe standard for intellectual honesty, so severe that I never meet anyone who did not seem to fall short of it in more than one respect; . . ."[45] Moreover, she writes to Father Perrin in a frank and unguarded manner. For example, in a letter she states that "I felt that I could not honestly give up my opinions concerning the non-Christian religions . . . and as a matter of fact time and meditation have only served to strengthen them."[46] Further, she comments that "contact with you was not able to persuade me to pray. On the contrary I thought the danger was all the greater, since I also had to beware of the power of suggestion in my friendship with you."[47]

In similar manner, Merton writes with openness and honesty about his spiritual journey. "He was not a plaster saint, or a figure from another age," writes McGinn, "but a contemporary whose fundamental honesty about the problems of church and society, as well as his own failures, continues to guarantee him a wide audience."[48]

Merton's questions, and the tensions in his mind, reflect the issues of contemporary spirituality. His quest reflects the searching of today's generation. As a result, he attracts individuals struggling to develop a spiritual life and to understand contemplative prayer, not because he presents clear answers, but because he accurately describes the questions, refuses easy answers, and offers helpful insights.[49] Thus, Merton is seen as a credible and valuable spiritual guide for honest but troubled searchers. "To his credit," writes Bacik, "he remained faithful to his own intuitions and was searching till the end of his life for an overarching perspective to encompass his expanding experiences."[50]

Religion versus Spirituality

Weil always clung to her sense of being an outsider to organized religion to the point where she felt that she had been given a special vocation in this regard.[51] In writing to Father Perrin, she particularly shows her outsider mentality. She writes that "you neither brought me the Christian inspiration nor did you bring me to Christ; for when I met you there was no longer any need; it had been done without the intervention of any human being."[52] Later in the same letter she states that "I always adopted the Christian attitude as the only possible one. I might say that I was born, I grew up and I always remained within the Christian inspiration."[53] Additionally, she states that "I knew quite well that my conception of life was Christian. That is why it never occurred to me that I could enter the Christian community."[54] In writing about the spiritual direction of her soul, she states that

"I think that God himself has taken it in hand from the start and still looks after it."[55] In sum, Weil was at peace in not formally becoming a Christian. Not unlike many seekers today, "Weil distrusted the conventional apparatus of piety and grace; . . ."[56] When writing to Father Perrin, Weil conveys this mistrust: "I should have been afraid of the possibilities of error and illusion which human influence in the divine order is likely to involve."[57]

Furthermore, Weil shows how God may work in a person's life outside of ecclesiastical boundaries. However, if one considers Ranson's "cycle of spirituality",[58] then Weil's path is incomplete. Not having a group of other believers with which to associate and fellowship, one may surmise whether this was a causal factor for the loneliness she communicates in one of her letters to Father Perrin. This loneliness is also suggested in her figure of the wounded hen. Fiedler writes incisively in this regard that "Weil finally remained on the threshold of the Church, crouching there for the love of all of us who are not inside, all the heretics, the secular dreamers, the prophesiers in strange tongues; . . ."[59]

By contrast, Merton considered his religious tradition as foundational. The backdrop for his writing is that of belonging to the Catholic Church. He was rooted and well-established in his faith tradition, also being widely-read therein.[60] His is an example of a seeker and believer working within an ecclesiastical community. He writes, for example, that "the Christian (even though he be a monk or a hermit) is never merely an isolated individual. He is a member of the praising community, the People of God."[61] Later, he emphasizes that "communal structures have a value that must not be underestimated."[62]

In Merton's life, the "cycle of spirituality" is brought to completion. Interestingly, in contrast to Weil, one notes in Merton's writing an underlying contentment and measure of peace and joy – a contributing factor, one may postulate, being the fellowship (*koinonia*) that he experienced in his community.

Interfaith Perspective

Weil demonstrated an interfaith perspective in that, according to Fiedler, "she refused to cut herself off from anyone, by refusing to identify herself completely with anyone or any cause".[63] In other words, she realized that if she withdrew and associated with only one particular group, then she may not be accepted by all outside of it. Rather, she held in tension all possible beliefs, both with their degrees of relevance and numerous contradictions. In sum, "her outsideness was the very *essence* of her position".[64]

After her first mystical experience, she later read the Bhagavad-Gita and St. John of the Cross, finding accounts of encounters similar to her own.[65] Russell notes that Weil was also fascinated by other religious sources such as the Upanishads and Mahayana Buddhism, and that within the Christian tradition she read the *Philokalia*.[66] Additionally, in spirit of interfaith thought, Weil wrote: "After this [a mystical experience] I came to feel that Plato was a mystic, that all the Iliad is bathed in Christian light, and that Dionysus and Osiris are in a certain sense Christ himself; and my love was thereby redoubled."[67]

Merton, too, was open to other paths to God. While this is not specifically mentioned in *Contemplative Praye*r, his spiritual pilgrimage included being involved in the interplay of different spiritual traditions. He became interested in the insights of Zen Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslim Sufis regarding deeper levels of prayer, as well as the contribution of existentialist thinkers, such as Heidegger, Camus, and Sartre.[68]

During his last years, he left his hermitage to travel in the East. He modelled how a Christian can dialogue with other religions. A comment made in his book, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, remarkably parallels Weil's stance, as far as the risk of upholding one

group leading to the rejection of others: "If I affirm myself as Catholic merely by denying all that is Muslim, Jewish, Protestant, Hindu, Buddhist, etc., in the end I will find that there is not much left for me to affirm as a Catholic".[69] In one sense, in Merton "the spirituality of the West met that of the East."[70]

Conclusion

This paper has compared and contrasted two works – one written by Simone Weil (*Waiting for God*), the other by Thomas Merton (*Contemplative Prayer*). Two perspectives have been emphasized: their approach to spirituality and their relevance to Christian spirituality today. Table 1 below entitled, "Comparative Study of *Waiting for God* by Simone Weil and *Contemplative Prayer* by Thomas Merton", represents a conclusion for the paper.

Table 1: Comparative Study of *Waiting for God* by Simone Weil and *Contemplative Prayer* by Thomas Merton

Approach to Spirituality		
Characteristic	Simone Weil (*Waiting for God*)	Thomas Merton (*Contemplative Prayer*)
Style of Spiritual Writing	• Paradox, contradiction, myth • Metaphorical language	• Practical – not theoretical • No formulae for prayer
Theme of Suffering	• Suffering: part of God's love • Affliction: spiritual opening	• Suffering: a form of prayer • Self-chosen sacrifices
Necessity of Grace	• Waiting for God • God seeking humans	• Need for God's grace • Grace versus effort
Silence in Prayer	• Need for silence • Need for attention	• Need for silence • Need for attention
Action and Contemplation	• Incarnational Christianity • Empathy for suffering	• Love of others • Openness to others
Relevance to Christian Spirituality Today		
Characteristic	Simone Weil (*Waiting for God*)	Thomas Merton (*Contemplative Prayer*)
Freedom of Thought	• Non-conventional thinking • Inspiration in other writings	• No stereotypical thinking • Unafraid of others' views
Openness and Honesty	• Authentic and direct • Utter honesty	• Fundamental honesty • Contemporary issues
Religion versus Spirituality	• Outsider to Church • Cycle of spirituality broken	• Rooted in a Community • Spirituality cycle complete
Interfaith Perspective	• Open to all groups • Interest in other religions	• Interest in other religions • Open to all groups

Endnotes

[1] Bernard McGinn, ed., *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, with an introduction by Bernard McGinn (New York: Random House, 2006), 246, 545.
[2] Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, with an introduction by Thich Nhat Hanh (New York: Random House, 1969), xv-xvi, xxi. In his foreword, Douglas V. Steere states that *Contemplative Prayer* was to be unwittingly Thomas Merton's final testament to us. It bears the heart of Merton's own message of renewal.
[3] Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd, with an introduction by Leslie A. Fiedler (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1951), xii. Overall, however, Weil's thoughts are presented in fragmentary form. She did not write any large-scale work, or leave a summation of her thought. *Waiting for God* is a collection of six letters and four essays. Fiedler states that "she published in her lifetime no intimate testimony to the secret religious life that made of her last few years a series of experiences perhaps unequalled since St. Theresa and St. John of the Cross." Fiedler adds a qualifier: "If she has left any detailed account of those experiences we have not yet seen it."
[4] Ibid., xxvii.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., xxix.
[7] Ibid., xxx.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Paul T. Harris, *Frequently Asked Questions about Christian Meditation: The Path of Contemplative Prayer*, with an introduction by Madeleine Simon (Toronto: Novalis, 2001), 149.
[10] Ibid., 152. Harris mentions how Neil McKenty, in his book *In the Stillness Dancing*, comments in general that Merton wrote a great deal about prayer but rather little about how he prayed.
[11] However, in other writings, some metaphors are also used, such as seeds and being born again. See *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1962); *Love and Living*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone and Brother Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979).
[12] James T. Russell, *Spiritual Classics: The Thinking Person's Guide to Great Spiritual Books* (London: Constable & Robinson, 2009), 126-127.
[13] Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, xix. Merton links the human condition of finitude with the need for prayer since only God can fill this void.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Weil, *Waiting for God*, 22.
[16] Ibid., 143.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., xxx. Conversely, Weil realized that all vestiges of selfhood – "the prison of self" (p. 144) – must ultimately be totally and unequivocally surrendered. Everything proudly associated by the "I" has to be offered up, thereby de-creating the ego. The purpose for such a transformation is so that Divine Love may flow unimpeded. Weil states that "we are created for this consent, and for this alone" (p. xxxiv). In sum, the nothingness of the self, the utter despair in which one feels naked and abandoned, is the death of the false self – that impediment to grace.
[19] Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 13.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., 10-11.
[22] Ibid., 21. One may note that Merton (similarly to Weil) writes about nothingness, also referring to the death of the false self – that hindrance and obstruction to grace.
[23] Ibid., 11.
[24] Weil, *Waiting for God*, 57.
[25] Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 5.
[26] Ibid., 10.
[27] Ibid., 19-20. Commenting further on contemplative prayer, Merton states that "the prayer of the heart introduces us into deep interior silence." Such prayer is always simple and often makes use of no words and no thoughts.
[28] Weil, *Waiting for God*, 32.
[29] She worked in a Renault factory and was a cook for the Spanish Republican army on the front lines of battle, where she got wounded. Her family fled the Nazis to America, but Weil returned to fight for the Free French based in England.

[30] Russell, *Spiritual Classics*, 128.
[31] Weil, *Waiting for God*, 24.
[32] Ibid., 25.
[33] Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 16.
[34] Ibid.; McGinn, ed., *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, 545. Merton indeed modelled a life involving action. He "became passionately involved in many public debates, such as racial and social justice, peace and war, and the relations of East and West." He also wrote extensively on political issues, such as civil rights, non-violence, and the nuclear arms race.
[35] Weil, *Waiting for God*, vii.
[36] Ibid., 27-28. Nevertheless, Weil perceptively differentiated religious writing from appreciation for other literary forms. After reading the *Bhagavat-Gita*, she writes that "strange to say it was in reading those marvellous words, words with such a Christian sound, put into the mouth of an incarnation of God, that I came to feel strongly that we owe an allegiance to religious truth which is quite different from the admiration we accord to a beautiful poem, it something far more categorical (p. 28)."
[37] Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 76.
[38] Thomas Merton, *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings*, selected with an introduction by Christine M. Bochen (New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 21. Bochen quotes Merton when she writes about him: "Every book I write," he confessed in *The Sign of Jonas*, "is a mirror of my own character and conscience" (*The Sign of Jonas*, 165).
[39] Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 68.
[40] Ibid., 68-69; Merton, *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings*, 30. Bochen observes that in Merton's journals (which span a period of 30 years from 1939 to 1968) one can truly witness his freedom of thought. "In the journals, we see the many sides of Merton, who could be pious and iconoclastic, petulant and profound, cerebral and passionate, insightful and struggling with illusions."
[41] McGinn, ed., *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, 246-247.
[42] Weil, *Waiting for God*, 26.
[43] Ibid., 27.
[44] Ibid., 29.
[45] Ibid., 25.
[46] Ibid., 28.
[47] Ibid.
[48] McGinn, ed., *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, 545. In *Contemplative Prayer*, for example, Merton seeks to balance the life of prayer and action. James Bacik, "Contemporary Spirituality", in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 220. In other works, Merton looks how to reconcile the desire for freedom and the demands of authority, how to enter into meaningful dialogue with other religions, and how to relate contemplation with the quest for justice.
[49] Bacik, "Contemporary Spirituality", 221. Another characteristic of Merton's writing found in *Contemplative Prayer* is his autobiographical style, which in itself implies a degree of openness and honesty of expression. Such a style is a feature of contemporary spirituality. Many people today find personal accounts of the spiritual journey illuminating because it helps to make the process concrete. Bacik gives examples of other authors who have written in this style: John Shea (*Stories of Faith*), John Dunne (*The Way of All the Earth*), and Henri Nouwen (*The Genesee Diary*). Bacik adds that "spiritual guides who speak most personally speak most universally." In other words, a personal narrative style helps to clarify the spiritual life of the readers. "Merton's rigorous honesty," notes Bacik, "and his amazing capacity for self-criticism serve as a model for all who hope to grow spiritually by becoming better readers of their own life stories."
[50] Ibid.
[51] Weil, *Waiting for God*, 31. In writing to Father Perrin, for example, Weil states that: "I have never once had, even for a moment, the feeling that God wants me to be in the Church. I have never even once had a feeling of uncertainty. I think that at the present time we can finally conclude that he does not want me in the Church . . . But unless I am mistaken I should say that it is his will that I should stay outside for the future too, except perhaps at the moment of death."
[52] Ibid., 21.
[53] Ibid., 22.
[54] Ibid., 24.
[55] Ibid., 30.
[56] Ibid., xxii.

[57] Ibid., 21-22. Her example also raises the twin issues of salvation outside an organized church or sect, and the existence of an invisible congregation of saints together with a visible Church. These questions bear relevance to many today who choose to remain on the threshold of organized religion.
[58] David Ranson, "Spirituality: What Is That?", in *Across the Great Divide: Bridging Spirituality and Religion Today* (Sydney: St Pauls, 2000), 17-20, 27. Ranson writes that spirituality is not a singular activity, but an integration of different activities, spread out over a shorter or longer period. He suggests that spirituality involves four stages of a cycle: *attending*, *inquiring*, *interpreting*, and *acting*. First, in attending, there is an initial spiritual moment of awakening or awareness, where a person recognizes that something or someone is beckoning them. Second, inquiring involves wanting to explore deeper aspects of the beckoning received. Third, interpreting introduces the social and religious sphere of spirituality where a person reflects on the deeper meaning of the beckoning experienced. Finally acting renders spirituality more than just an idea but a way of living. Ideally then, the spiritual task is to bring the process to a completion by moving through the four phases in the cycle of spirituality.
[59] Weil, *Waiting for God*, xxvi.
[60] In *Contemplative Prayer*, for example, there are references to sayings of the Desert Fathers (*Apothegmata*), John Cassian (*Conferences on Prayer*), St. Athanasius (*Ep. ad Marcellinum*, *De Virginitate*), Kadloubovsky and Palmer (*Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*), Augustine (*Confessions*), Abbé Monchanin (*Ecrits Spirituels*), St. John of the Cross (*Dark Night*, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*), Evagrius (*De Oratione*), St. Bernard (*Sermones in Cantica*), Peter the Venerable (*De Miraculis*), Peter of Celles (*Epistola*, *Liber de Passibus*), St. Aelred of Rievaulx (*De Institutione Inclusarum*), St. John Chrysostom (*Incomprehensibility of God*), Walter Hilton (*Scale of Perfection*)
[61] Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 1.
[62] Ibid., 3. Notwithstanding, Merton acknowledges that such communities do *not* have to fit certain pre-determined moulds (such as Trappist or Carmelite Orders).
[63] Weil, *Waiting for God*, ix.
[64] Ibid., x. Fiedler adds that "to have become rooted in the context of a particular religion, Simone Weil felt, would, on the one hand, have exposed her to what she calls 'the Church patriotism,' with a consequent blindness to the faults of her own group and the virtues of others, and would, on the other hand, have separated her from the common condition here below, which finds us all 'outsiders, uprooted, in exile.'"
[65] Ibid., xxiv.
[66] Russell, *Spiritual Classics*, 126.
[67] Weil, *Waiting for God*, 28, 31-32. Weil's interfaith perspective is also reflected in her following line of reasoning: "Christianity should contain all vocations without exception since it is catholic. In consequence the Church should also. But in my eyes Christianity is catholic by right but not in fact. So many things are outside of it, so many things that I love and do not want to give up, so many things that God loves, otherwise they would not be in existence."
[68] Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, xviii.
[69] Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 128-129.
[70] Kosuke Koyama, "Interplay with Other Religions", in *The Study of Spirituality*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 559-560.

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