



Christian Outside The Church: Exploring Prevenient Grace Through Simone Weil

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Abstract: This article seeks to read prevenient grace through the lens of Simone Weil, interpreting the Methodist understanding of prevenient grace in terms of Weil's account of grace through attention. It highlights John Wesley's optimism of grace—his conviction that God's prevenient grace is free for all—as a framework that resonates with Weil's vision of attentive openness amid suffering. It considers how this dialogue between Wesley and Weil can inform Christian engagement in pluralistic societies. It concludes with a holistic proposal for rethinking what grace could look like in a multireligious and multicultural context as a theological authority.

Keywords: *Prevenient Grace • Simone Weil • Attention • Grace and Suffering • Methodist Spirituality • Ecumenism*

Introduction

Living in Cambridge, I often encounter reminders of renowned scholars. For instance, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) once resided at Whewell's Court, just across from Jesus Lane, where Wesley House is situated. As a student from a non-Western country in an international setting, I found his work a helpful prompt to reflect on language, self-expression, and attitude in engaging with others. While exploring Wittgenstein I encountered Palle Yourgrau's biography of Simone Weil, which highlighted interesting parallels between the two.¹ Weil's profound spiritual and ethical self-expression, despite her death at just thirty-four (1909-1943), inspired me to delve more deeply into theological questions.

In her spiritual autobiography, Weil's letters to the French Dominican priest Joseph-Marie Perrin, whom she met in 1941 in Marseille during World War II, are especially arresting. She wrote truthfully of the problem of God, the tension between divine love and human suffering, and her decision to remain outside the institutional Church despite embracing a Christian worldview. She stated: "I always adopted the Christian attitude as the only possible

¹ Palle Yourgrau, *Simone Weil*, Critical Lives (London: Reaktion Books, 2011). Yourgrau, among others, notes parallels between Simone Weil (1909-1943) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), highlighting their shared concern with ethics, mysticism, and integrity amid the crises of the early twentieth century. See also Jack Manzi, ed., *Between Wittgenstein and Weil: Comparisons in Philosophy, Religion, and Ethics*, Routledge Studies in Twentieth-Century Philosophy (New York: Routledge, 2024).

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one [...] My vocation imposes upon me the necessity of remaining outside the Church.”² Weil lived and died as what Eric O. Springsted called a “Christian outside the church and as within,” a paradox that earned her the description of ‘patron saint of all outsiders.’³

Why did Weil, who refused baptism and distanced herself from her Jewish identity, still believe the Christian approach to be the best? And what kind of Christian attitude did she regard as most effective in addressing the world’s problems? Central to her answer is the concept of ‘attention.’ For Weil, attention is a selfless focus that opens one to the presence of God and the possibility of receiving grace. She saw this focused attention as linked to our deepest desires, above all the desire for goodness, and as serving to open humanity up to the possibility of grace. As she explained: “Under the name of truth, I also included beauty, virtue and every kind of goodness, so that for me, it was a question of a conception of the relationship between grace and desire”.⁴ She described attention as a spiritual exercise, particularly in prayer; attention is an ethical effort and a compassionate presence; and attention is an intellectual activity, especially for educators.⁵ As she wrote: “Not only does the love of God have attention for its substance; the love of our neighbour, which we know to be the same love, is made of this same substance.”⁶ Peter Roberts, in his study of Weil’s ethical theory, observes that attention is a pathway to grace, enabling openness to it and bringing calm and tranquillity, especially in affliction.⁷

This conviction prompted me to reflect on my own Methodist heritage, where grace is at the heart of salvation. John Wesley taught that God’s redemptive grace works in three modes: prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying. Of these, prevenient grace — “the grace that comes before” — is foundational.⁸ It precedes human decision, liberates the will, and makes possible our response to God’s offer of reconciliation. As Marjorie Suchocki notes, prevenient grace, justifying grace, and sanctifying grace are not separate gifts but adaptations of the one divine grace to human need.⁹ In her terms, prevenient grace is “creative grace”, shaping human cooperation with God’s ongoing work.¹⁰

Against this background, the question arises: can Weil’s philosophy of attention illuminate and expand the Methodist understanding of prevenient grace? More specifically, can her vision provide a creative framework for understanding grace beyond ecclesial boundaries, especially in multi-ethnic and multi-religious contexts where Christians often find themselves ‘outside’ the mainstream?

This paper argues that Weil’s theory of attention resonates strongly with Wesley’s optimism of grace — his conviction that prevenient grace is accessible for all — and that together they provide a theological resource for Christian engagement in pluralistic societies. The study proceeds in four sections. First, it outlines the theological framework of prevenient grace. Second, it examines Weil’s concept of attention as a pathway to grace. Third, it offers a comparative analysis of Wesleyan prevenient grace and Weil’s ethical theory of gravity, decreation, and grace. Ultimately, it examines the implications of this dialogue for Christian practice in multi-religious contexts, with a focus on the challenges and opportunities facing Methodists today.

² Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, ed. Janet Martin Soskice and Malcolm Muggeridge, trans. Emma Craufurd, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2021), 24. *Waiting for God* is a collection of essays and notes by Simone Weil and was compiled by Father Perrin and translated into English by Emma Craufurd. The use of *Waiting for God* in this article refers to the Routledge Classics edition published in 2021. See also pp. 35, 44, where Weil reiterates her conviction that her vocation required her to remain outside the church.

³ Eric O. Springsted, *Simone Weil and the Suffering of Love* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley, 1986); Thomas R. Nevin, *Simone Weil: Portrait of a Self-Exiled Jew* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

⁴ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 26.

⁵ Weil, 61.

⁶ Weil, 69.

⁷ Peter Roberts, ‘Attention, Asceticism, and Grace: Simone Weil and Higher Education’, *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 10, no. 3 (July 2011): 324, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474022211408037>; Peter Roberts, ‘Education and the Ethics of Attention: The Work of Simone Weil’, *British Journal of Educational Studies* 71, no. 3 (4 May 2023): 272, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2022.2109589>.

⁸ Charles Yrigoyen, ‘Prevenient Grace’, in *Historical Dictionary of Methodism*, ed. Charles Yrigoyen and Susan Eltscher Warrick, Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 299.

⁹ Marjorie Suchocki, ‘Wesleyan Grace’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 542–43.

¹⁰ Suchocki, 552.

Prevenient Grace in Methodist Theology: Trinitarian, Repentance, and Collaboration

John Wesley's understanding of salvation has often been described as a combination of Western and Eastern views on grace. From Augustine, he inherited the view that salvation begins with God's initiative, as God forgives sin and declares the sinner righteous. At the same time, he drew on the Greek perspective by emphasising the importance of human response in the effectiveness of grace. He thus articulated a structured vision of salvation encompassing prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace. Prevenient grace in particular was Wesley's answer to Calvinism's strict predestinarianism, affirming instead a universal and accessible grace. Wesley's sermon 'Free Grace' makes this point explicitly: "The grace or love of God, whence cometh our salvation, is FREE IN ALL, and FREE FOR ALL."¹¹ Charles Wesley expressed a similar conviction in his hymn on 'God's everlasting love', where he wrote, "Preventing grace for all is free."¹² Together, the Wesleys placed prevenient grace at the heart of their theological vision, making it the foundation of Methodist evangelism and spirituality.

As time has passed scholars adopting a holistic approach to prevenient grace have consistently examined it through a Trinitarian lens, particularly emphasising the work of the Holy Spirit. This perspective highlights that God's grace is not merely a gift but also underscores God's works — his initiative toward humanity and his invitation to relational collaboration and cooperation. This grace transcends boundaries, extending an invitation to all people, regardless of background or status, to partner with the divine. To understand this more fully, we will explore three key aspects: the Trinitarian framework that underpins prevenient grace, repentance as central to Methodist theology and practice, and the concept of collaborative creation, where humanity and the divine work together in harmony.

The Trinitarian Framework of Prevenient Grace

Kenneth Cracknell and Susan J. White, specialists in interfaith dialogue, argue that Methodist theology is imbued with an "optimism of grace" and a refusal to set limits on God's power to transform individuals and societies.¹³ For them, prevenient grace underscores inclusivity and transcends boundaries, inviting all people into a relationship with God. Cracknell, in particular, frames prevenient grace through a Trinitarian lens, emphasising the work of the Holy Spirit. He argues that "grace touches all human lives positively" and "all people are already graced" through God's omnipresence, and the work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ He insists that Grace is not an entity or substance introduced into human beings to perfect their fallen natures; instead, Grace *is* the Holy Spirit, the very life of God within human beings, and as such, it is all-pervasive and certainly prevenient.¹⁵

Influenced by interfaith theologians such as John B. Cobb Jr. and Wesley Ariarajah, Cracknell extends this vision beyond the Church. Cobb asserts that humans do not exist separately from God before developing a relationship with Him. Instead, he highlights that human life is inherently infused with God's presence.¹⁶ Building on this idea, Cracknell argues that humans' knowledge of God and their ability to do good stem from the very life of God within them.¹⁷ Similarly, Ariarajah exhibits a strong empathy for those who may not have had the opportunity to encounter Christianity, yet have responded to prevenient grace. Drawing a parallel with the patriarchs of the Old Testament, he

¹¹ John Wesley, 'Sermon 110: Free Grace', in *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 3: Sermons, III, 71-114*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 3, The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 544.

¹² John Wesley, 'On Everlasting Love', *The Arminian Magazine*, 1778, 430–32, <https://archive.org/details/arminian-magazine-vol-1-1778-drew-university/page/n423/mode/2up?q=prevenient+grace>. In 1778, the *Arminian Magazine* published several editions of hymns by Charles Wesley centred around the theme of 'God Everlasting Love.' These editions reveal his theological response to the increasing challenge from Calvinist participants in the early Methodist revival concerning God's saving grace. This hymn was derived from John 12:32: 'And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.'

¹³ Kenneth Cracknell and Susan J. White, *An Introduction to World Methodism*, Introduction to Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 93.

¹⁴ Kenneth Cracknell, *Our Doctrines: Methodist Theology as Classical Christianity*, Cliff College Academic Series (Claver: Cliff College, 1998), 62–63.

¹⁵ Cracknell, 63.

¹⁶ John B. Cobb, *Grace and Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 35–55.

¹⁷ Cracknell, *Our Doctrines*, 63.

suggests that such individuals are justified by faith in anticipation of Christ's revelation.¹⁸ Cracknell extends this idea by asserting that God is already at work through the Holy Spirit in the lives of these individuals. This is particularly evident in the saints, sages, believers and devotees whose love and devotion to God are expressed in ways distinct from Christian practices.¹⁹ Ariarajah also introduces the concept of evangelism as inviting people to move from 'grace to grace'. He contends that Wesley's life provides a compelling response to objections against the doctrine of universal grace. Wesley, who upheld the belief in universal prevenient grace, simultaneously exemplified a profound commitment to evangelism, demonstrating that the two are not mutually exclusive.²⁰

Cracknell argues that Methodist theology is as much Pneumatological as it is Christocentric, contending that the work of the Holy Spirit is as central to Methodists as the work of Christ.²¹ He highlights that this theological balance shapes a dual focus: personal holiness and a transformative engagement with structural and systemic sins of 18th-century society, including the slave trade, lack of access to credit for the poor, child labour, and the trafficking of alcohol and drugs.²² For Cracknell, trinitarian prevenient grace is an unrestricted and boundless grace that not only empowers personal conversion but also undergirds evangelism in a culturally and religiously plural society.

Indeed, Cracknell, White, Cobb, and Ariarajah's examination of prevenient grace has contributed significantly to interreligious, interfaith, and ecumenical debates. Their works provide an account that encourages and supports a diversity of Christians to engage in their societies and in the world. For Cracknell and White, 'Optimism of grace' is not about illusion but working with the Holy Spirit in hope rather than despairing fear. However, while their works point outward, Wesleyan scholar John R. Tyson's concept of prevenient grace points inward, purposely asking questions towards our own attitudes. Tyson believes that understanding God's work of prevenient grace is crucial in our work as followers of Wesley or Methodists.²³

Repentance as Central to Methodist Theology and Practice

Tyson first responds to Pelagianism²⁴ by stating that Wesley believed in original sin but did not believe that humans are saved by free will. What characterises Wesley's soteriology more properly is its emphasis on prevenient grace, which Wesley defined as 'a work of the Holy Spirit upon the human heart; it is not an act of human, unspoiled free will.'²⁵ For Tyson, the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. In line with Wesley, he affirms that the Spirit works in the hearts of all people — convicting, calling, and drawing them to God. Salvation, therefore, is a cooperative work.²⁶ God the Father continually reaches out to His fallen children through the Spirit, breaking the hardness of hearts and making all things new.²⁷

Yet prevenient grace may be refused. Tyson draws on Wesley's sermon, 'On Working out our Salvation' that Wesley based on Philippians 2: 12-13 asks us to 'work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.' And Wesley states, 'No man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath.'²⁸ For Tyson, God's work of prevenient grace, which can be, and too frequently is, refused, must be met by our repentance and faith. Correspondingly, Tyson emphasises our responsibility, or as Tyson puts it, the way of the Wesleyans and Methodists

¹⁸ Wesley Ariarajah, 'Evangelism and Wesley's Catholicity of Grace', in *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 144.

¹⁹ Cracknell, *Our Doctrines*, 65.

²⁰ Ariarajah, 'Evangelism and Wesley's Catholicity of Grace', 144.

²¹ Cracknell, *Our Doctrines*, 68.

²² Cracknell, 69.

²³ John R. Tyson, *The Way of the Wesleys: A Short Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cambridge UK: William B. Eerdmans, 2014), 57–66.

²⁴ Tyson, 57. Tyson states that Arminians are sometimes called 'Pelagians' or 'Semi-Pelagians' after Pelagius (A.D. 390–418), an ancient writer who rejected the concept of original sin and believed that humans could achieve salvation through their own free will.

²⁵ Tyson, 57.

²⁶ Tyson, 58.

²⁷ Tyson, 57–58.

²⁸ John Wesley, 'Sermon 85: On Working Out Our Own Salvation', in *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 3: Sermons, III, 71–114*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 3, The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 203–4.

is to live through repentance and faith. He argues that since prevenient grace is an invitation to cooperation, it is a relationship, and we have our 'work' to do in responding to God's grace.

Again, drawing on Wesley's sermon, 'On Working Out Our Own Salvation', Tyson notes Wesley's conviction that believers are called to fulfil righteousness, to love God because he first loved us, and to walk in love.²⁹ In the same sermon, Tyson further highlights Wesley's teaching on repentance and faith as a response to God's grace, rooted in Isaiah 1:16-17, 'cease to do evil; learn to do well, be zealous of good works, the works of piety, as well as works of mercy; deny yourselves every pleasure which does not prepare you for taking pleasure in God, and willingly embrace every means of drawing near to God.'³⁰ Tyson interprets this through Wesley's doctrine of the 'means of grace', emphasising that practices such as prayer, Scripture reading, the Lord's Supper, fasting, and acts of mercy are not merely external duties but the very channels through which God's grace forms believers in holiness and love.³¹ In concluding Tyson points towards a verse in Charles Wesley's hymns of God's Everlasting Love, 'All in me the hindrance lies', which he anoints as the most successful hymn to respond to Predestinarianism and its theological corollaries.³²

In sum, Tyson presents prevenient grace as a renewal of Wesley's holistic vision of salvation by bringing our attention back to God's initial act of grace. Salvation is seen holistically as a cooperative endeavour in which the Divine Will, in the Person of the Holy Spirit, comes upon our hearts with the initial drawing of God's grace. The Spirit works on our fallen will to the extent that we are 'respond-able' to God, able to embrace every means of drawing near and to cooperate with God.

Collaboration in Prevenient Grace

Given these facts, scholars such as Marjorie Suchocki have stressed that significant work must be done within Methodist theology explicitly in the 'area of grace' because understanding grace includes the whole of God's activity.³³ Drawing on thinkers such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, John B. Cobb Jr, Steve Manskar, and Randy Maddox, she develops Maddox's notion of 'responsible grace.' In reference to Wesley's sermon of 'Free Grace', Maddox signifies grace as both a gift (*charisma*) and an invitation to collaborate with God.³⁴ Maddox's views on 'Prevenient Grace' and 'Responsible Grace' are interconnected. Prevenient grace initiates the relationship between God and humanity, awakening individuals to their need for God and enabling them to respond to God's call. Responsible grace insists that while God's grace enables and invites, it does not override human free will. Humans must respond to God's grace through faith, repentance, and ethical living. This response is essential in the process of salvation and sanctification. Building on Maddox's concept of responsible grace, Suchocki argues that we should view grace as encompassing all of God's activities, not just those related to redemption, but also his creative acts.³⁵

Suchocki believes that Wesley's theology is hardly static; it is dynamically shaped through his constant attention to the needs of the people who came to be called Methodists.³⁶ So, writing from a process theology perspective, she views grace as an expression of God's continual involvement in creation and his creation and salvation as far as we can trace in the traditional definition of prevenient grace. By extension, God's grace is not merely a static gift but an ongoing process inviting human cooperation.³⁷ Therefore, Suchocki strongly emphasises prevenient grace, which she calls 'creative grace'. The entire creation embodies God's grace, a continuous and timeless display of

²⁹ Tyson, *The Way of the Wesleys*, 59.

³⁰ Wesley, 'Sermon 85: On Working Out Our Own Salvation' Sermon 85, Section 25, Works 3:205.

³¹ Tyson, *The Way of the Wesleys*, 59.

³² Tyson, 61.

³³ Suchocki, 'Wesleyan Grace', 541. Suchocki is considered for three reasons: First, it is essential to understand Wesley's approach to developing grace. Second, it is crucial to consider the context in which Wesley presented his teachings. Third, it is necessary to emphasise several significant changes that have occurred since Wesley's time and to reinterpret a Wesleyan understanding of grace to encompass the entirety of God's work in the universe, which includes but is not limited to, the aspect of God's work related to salvation.

³⁴ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, Tennessee: Kingswood Books, 1994).

³⁵ Suchocki, 'Wesleyan Grace', 540.

³⁶ Suchocki, 541.

³⁷ Suchocki, 543.

God's nature with His creatures. By implication, she views justifying and sanctifying grace, as much as prevenient grace, as involving God's action on the soul and the means given through the community.³⁸

With a similar thought to Cracknell, an essential aspect of Suchocki's 'creative grace' is the omnipresence of God, meaning that God's grace permeates all aspects of existence. Again, she argues that the omnipresence of God is only fully evident in the concept of prevenient grace. Drawing on Wesley's other sermon, 'The Unity of the Divine Being,' she argues that God's omnipresence is demonstrated in his eternal free grace, especially in prevenient grace.³⁹ She cites, 'nearly allied to the eternity of God, is his omnipresence. As he springs through infinite duration, he cannot but exist through infinite space, according to his question, equivalent to the strongest assertion, "Do not I fill heaven and earth saith the Lord."⁴⁰

From this perspective, Suchocki reads Wesley's view of grace and the Spirit as presenting God as Creator and Governor. As Creator, he brings the world into existence as it pleases Him; as Governor, he exercises justice now and in the future. For this reason, Suchocki claims that the acts of creating and governing are based on the assumption of God's omnipresence and intimate knowledge of all that exists.⁴¹ So, she understands God's attribute of omniscience as follows from omnipresence, and omnipotence expresses God's omnipresence.⁴²

Suchocki also emphasises our way of repentance in God's grace. Grace represents God's bending to meet our needs; our most profound need is to be restored to God's image. Therefore, this restoration involves repentance first through prevenient grace, then forgiveness for sin through justifying grace, and growth in love through sanctifying grace. These three modes are not different 'graces,' but each is the adaptation of God's grace to the specific needs of human beings that require our repentance.⁴³ By this, Suchocki made her respond to the 'Happy Fault' (*Felix Culpa*).⁴⁴ In addressing sin and evil, Suchocki views these not as intrinsic elements of human nature but as distortions or disruptions in the relational process between the harmony of God and humanity. Theodore Runyon and Michael Lodahl's perspectives on creation and grace align well with this view, arguing that humanity misused the freedom granted by God, turning away from God and striving to create a self-sufficient existence. This pursuit of self-sufficiency led humans away from a harmonious relationship with God and other creations.⁴⁵ In contrast, 'creative grace' represents God's ongoing offer of transformation and healing. It acts against these distortions, continually inviting humanity towards the realisation of the divine image, thereby working towards restoring the intended relationship between God and creation.⁴⁶

In summary, prevenient grace is the divine grace deeply rooted in a Trinitarian framework, emphasising the roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in drawing humanity towards God. Prevenient grace is closely linked with repentance, as it empowers us to turn away from sin and begin a faith journey. Moreover, prevenient grace unveils God's omnipresence and emphasises his creative acts and collaboration. By extension, human beings are co-creators with God and respond to grace by actively participating in the ongoing creation and transformation of the world. This situates our responsibility and collaboration within a larger socio-ethical context where human responsibility includes addressing systemic injustices. This collaborative aspect underscores the dynamic relationship between God and believers, where grace is received and worked out through faith and cooperation with God. The following section examines Simone Weil's 'Attention.' Attention to Weil is a crucial concept for experiencing grace.

³⁸ Suchocki, 544.

³⁹ Suchocki, 549.

⁴⁰ John Wesley, 'Sermon 120: The Unity of the Divine Being', in *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 4: Sermons, IV, 115-151*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 4, The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 61.

⁴¹ Suchocki, 'Wesleyan Grace', 549.

⁴² Suchocki, 549.

⁴³ Suchocki, 542-43.

⁴⁴ Suchocki, 551-52.

⁴⁵ Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 11; Michael E. Lodahl, *God of Nature and of Grace: Reading the World in a Wesleyan Way* (Nashville, Tennessee: Kingswood, 2004), 150-51.

⁴⁶ Suchocki, 'Wesleyan Grace', 551-52.

Simone Weil, A Suffering Life: Ethical Theory, Grace and the Concept of Attention

Weil's Suffering Life

First and foremost, Weil's life itself constitutes her chief work; without some sense of her biography, her thought cannot be fully understood. As Peter Roberts observes, Weil's ethical theory must be discerned not only from her writings but also from her actions.⁴⁷ Similarly, Ben Davis, in *The Political Philosophy of Simone Weil*, argues that her vocation was to think deeply, to write, and then to act in the world—continually revising her thought in light of lived experience. In this way, Weil's philosophy embodies a balance between reflection and action.⁴⁸

Weil was born on 3 February 1909 in Paris into a cultured Jewish family of Alsatian descent. Her father, Bernard, was a physician; her mother, Selma, had hoped to study medicine herself. Both parents were agnostic, and the household practised no formal religion.⁴⁹ Weil's Jewish heritage remained a complex issue throughout her life. She later rejected the idea of Jewish 'chosenness,' believing it created division, and distanced herself from identifying as Jewish. Yet her awareness of Jewish marginality in twentieth-century Europe may have sharpened her sensitivity to affliction and oppression. Eric Chenavier suggests that her stance at times slipped into a troubling rejection of her own Jewish identity, raising questions about antisemitic undertones in her thought.⁵⁰

Simone Weil's brother, André Weil (1906–1998), became a renowned mathematician. In childhood, Simone was often compared with him in her schooling, which left her feeling intellectually inferior and physically unattractive.⁵¹ Despite her striking black hair and almond-shaped eyes, she deliberately de-emphasised her femininity, favouring plain men's clothing and, as her niece Sylvie Weil later recalled, consistently wearing a navy blue beret of monastic simplicity.⁵²

From an early age, she displayed unusual intellectual gifts. She began Greek at twelve and later studied Sanskrit. At the Lycée Henri IV, she was taught by Émile Chartier (Alain).⁵³ After initially failing, she gained admission in 1928 to the École Normale Supérieure, excelling in philosophy. Simone de Beauvoir, her contemporary, recalled her as 'a genius' who finished first while Beauvoir herself placed second.⁵⁴ Weil became a devoted teacher, translating texts from Greek, Latin, German, and English, and was loved by her students. She was remembered for her austere counsel: 'When you make a decision, always choose what will cost you the most'.⁵⁵

Weil is a product of war. She experienced the First World War, the Russian Revolution, the Great Depression, the rise of Fascism, and the Second World War throughout her life. She consistently identified with the suffering and the marginalised. Jacques Cabaud notes that she longed to abolish the degrading divide between intellectual and manual labour.⁵⁶ In 1933, she took leave from teaching to work in a Renault factory, enduring harsh conditions in solidarity with workers. In 1936, during the Spanish Civil War, she briefly joined an anarchist militia, though her poor health and an accidental burn from boiling oil forced her to return home. Her willingness to suffer alongside others reflected her conviction that philosophy must be lived.

⁴⁷ Roberts, 'Education and the Ethics of Attention', 268.

⁴⁸ Benjamin P. Davis, *Simone Weil's Political Philosophy: Field Notes from the Margins* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2023), 14, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9798881813475>.

⁴⁹ Yourgrau, *Simone Weil*, 15–16.

⁵⁰ Robert Chenavier, *Simone Weil, une Juive antisémite ? Éteindre les polémiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 2021); Robert Chenavier, *Simone Weil, Attention to the Real*, trans. Bernard E. Doering (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012). In his study *Simone Weil, une Juive antisémite ? Éteindre les polémiques*, Chenavier critically assesses accusations of antisemitism in Weil's writings and argues that such interpretations often arise from selective and decontextualised citations. Although this monograph is in French, Chenavier's earlier work in *Simone Weil: Attention to the Real*, translated by Bernard E. Doering, provides an English language insight into the development and context of Weil's thought.

⁵¹ Yourgrau, *Simone Weil*, 18–19.

⁵² Yourgrau, 30.

⁵³ Yourgrau, 33–35.

⁵⁴ Yourgrau, 36.

⁵⁵ Yourgrau, 44.

⁵⁶ Jacques Cabaud, *Simone Weil: A Fellowship in Love* (London: Harvill Press, 1964), 51.

Weil endured severe migraines from adolescence, which tormented her throughout life. In 1938, at the Benedictine Abbey of Solesmes, she underwent a mystical experience while listening to the *Laudate Dominum*.⁵⁷ She later described how, despite her pain, she was lifted above her suffering and overwhelmed by the beauty of the chanting. She wrote,

In 1938, I spent ten days at Solesmes, from Palm Sunday to Easter Tuesday, following all the liturgical services. I was suffering from splitting headaches; each sound hurt me like a blow; by an extreme effort of concentration, I was able to rise above this wretched flesh, to leave it to suffer by itself, heaped up in a corner, and to find perfect and pure joy in the unimaginable beauty of the chanting and the words. This experience by analogy enabled me to better understand the possibility of divine love in affliction. It goes without saying that during these services, the thought of the passion of Christ entered into my being once and for all.⁵⁸

From then on, Christ's suffering became the lens through which she interpreted her own. She adopted an ascetic lifestyle: refusing more food than the poor received, dressing simply, and giving away most of her earnings to workers and students.

During the Nazi occupation, Weil, a Jewish woman, faced significant danger. In 1941, she escaped to Marseille, where she met Father Joseph-Marie Perrin, a Dominican priest, through the farmer and lay theologian Gustave Thibon. Thibon, a renowned thinker and writer, was nominated five times for the Nobel Prize in Literature. He recognised the spiritual and intellectual similarities between Weil and Perrin and arranged their meeting. This connection proved crucial in Weil's spiritual development, as her later correspondence with Perrin deepened her understanding of Christian theology and mysticism throughout her final years.

In 1942, after a brief stay in the United States, Weil moved to London to join the Free French under Charles de Gaulle. She insisted on living under wartime rations, even as tuberculosis ravaged her body. Her refusal to eat more than the meagre allowances available to those in occupied France led to her death at Ashford, Kent, on 24 August 1943, aged thirty-four. The cause was recorded as cardiac failure due to starvation.⁵⁹

In short, Weil's biography illuminates the inseparability of her suffering, spirituality, and thought. Her life was marked by solidarity with workers, the burdens and confusion of Jewish heritage, exile and war, mystical encounters with Christ, and unrelenting physical affliction. These shaped her reflections on attention, grace, and the moral obligation to love one's neighbour. In *The Need for Roots*, written in her final months, she stressed: 'To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul'.⁶⁰ Romina Gurashi observes that her solidarity remained rooted in suffering, a theme that defines her spiritual witness.⁶¹

Much of Weil's work was published only after her death. Before leaving Father Perrin, she entrusted him with the writings later issued as *Waiting for God*. In this correspondence, she made clear that her decision to remain outside the institutional Church reflected a lifelong suspicion of collective bodies. For Weil, the Church risked becoming a 'collective' that stifled individual conscience and obscured the purity of attention to God and neighbour.⁶² To remain outside was for her a vocation, preserving the freedom to seek truth and grace without the distortions of institutional power.

To Gustave Thibon, she gave, almost absentmindedly, twelve large notebooks, from which he compiled selections published as *Gravity and Grace*. These two volumes have perhaps become the most widely read of Weil's works.

⁵⁷ *Laudate Dominum* (Praise the Lord) is a hymn of praise drawn from Psalm 117 (116 in the Vulgate) traditionally sung during the liturgy of the hours and used in various Christian worship settings.

⁵⁸ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 29.

⁵⁹ Yourgrau, *Simone Weil*, 105.

⁶⁰ Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*, Routledge Classics (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002), 41.

⁶¹ Romina Gurashi, *Pathways of Peace: The Philosophy and Sociology of Peace and Nonviolence* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 32.

⁶² Weil, *Waiting for God*, 40.

Yet it is important to note, as several scholars have observed, that *Gravity and Grace* presents a complicated legacy. Because Thibon heavily edited and even rewrote parts of Weil's notebooks, the text cannot be taken as a straightforward source of her thought. Contemporary Weil scholarship, therefore, uses it cautiously, often consulting concordances that map Thibon's selections back to Weil's original notebooks. The Andic Springsted concordance, made available through the American Weil Society, is one such resource.⁶³

Despite these challenges, *Gravity and Grace* remains significant as an entry point into Weil's philosophy, particularly her reflections on affliction, attention, and grace. Together with *Waiting for God*, it continues to shape contemporary engagement with her thought.

Weil's Ethical Theory and Grace

Drawing on *Gravity and Grace*, Peter Roberts observes that Weil does not fit neatly into any single philosophical tradition. While she was influenced by Eastern texts such as the *Tao Te Ching* and the Bhagavad Gita, as well as by Western thinkers including Fyodor Dostoevsky, Albert Camus, and Søren Kierkegaard, her thought is best described as eclectic, combining ethical and aesthetic insights. Roberts identifies three central ideas in Weil's work that illuminate her concept of attention: gravity, decreation, and grace.

First, 'gravity' represents the human condition, pulling us down just as physical gravity pulls us toward the ground. It reveals our tendency to opt for selfishness and the easier path when confronted with moral dilemmas. Weil often connected gravity with what she called 'force'—the kind of power that crushes people and treats them as objects, taking away their freedom and dignity. In her essay 'The Iliad, Poem of Force,' she describes force as 'that x that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing,' a reality evident in both violence and oppression.⁶⁴ Closely linked to this is her idea of necessity—the unavoidable limits of human life, such as hunger, illness, and death. In another essay, 'God in Plato,' she calls 'necessity,' 'irreducible evil which one can only hope to limit'.⁶⁵ She cautions that we must not simply give in to the pressures of society, which can shape us in ways that crush our freedom and distract us from God.

For Weil, gravity, force, and necessity, although burdensome, prepare us to encounter God by removing illusions of self-sufficiency and awakening our need for grace. In recognising our limitations, grace enters—the only power capable of lifting us beyond gravity and transforming suffering into an entryway to God and neighbour.

Building on this, Weil proposes the practice of 'decreation' as the human response to grace. Decreation is a radical unselfing that requires humility, patient listening, and the surrender of the dominating 'I'. In emptying ourselves of self-centredness, we make space for the presence of God and compassion toward others. Thus, ethical growth does not arise from within but depends on what comes from beyond us—above all, divine grace, as well as the presence of others and transcendent values that call us beyond self-interest.⁶⁶

Correspondingly, for Weil, grace alone can overcome gravity. It opens a "void" where defences and self-centred impulses fall away, enabling us to face others and God. Grace appears most clearly in affliction, where suffering strips away illusions and leaves us vulnerable. In such moments, it brings a tranquillity that does not end suffering but allows us to bear it with love. This marks a shift from conventional views of ethical development, as Weil stresses the role of external forces and the transformative power of grace in moral life.⁶⁷ These three concepts outline a path of personal moral growth, even as Weil also extends her focus to social concerns.

Thus, gravity, decreation, and grace together describe a path of moral transformation. Gravity discloses our fallen condition; decreation is the self-emptying that loosens our attachment to self; and grace is the transcendent gift that enables us to recognise and respond to others in compassion. At its heart, this vision situates goodness not

⁶³ Martin Andic and Eric O. Springsted, 'Simone Weil's Notebooks: Concordance to Gravity and Grace', American Weil Society, accessed 25 July 2025, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/67b7530f067f5a62672c94ea/t/67c3a5329428da04bf0c405a/1740875058635/Andic_Key_to_Gravity_and_Grace.pdf.

⁶⁴ Simone Weil, *The Iliad, or the Poem of Force*, trans. Mary McCarthy (Wallingford, Pennsylvania: Pendle Hill, 1956), 3, <https://cominsitu.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/simone-weil-the-iliad-or-the-poem-of-force-4.pdf>.

⁶⁵ Simone Weil, 'God in Plato', in *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks* (London and New York: Routledge, 2024), 86.

⁶⁶ Roberts, 'Education and the Ethics of Attention', 272.

⁶⁷ Roberts, 272.

as a human achievement but as the fruit of divine grace encountered through attention. The following section turns to Weil's concept of attention, the practice through which we become open to grace and to the presence of God in the lives of others.

Weil's Concept of Attention

For Weil, attention is not simply a mental act but the very practice through which we become open to grace. Having shown how gravity, force, and necessity weigh down the human condition, and how decreation offers a response, she turns to attention as the disciplined posture that allows grace to transform us. Her writings in *Waiting for God* highlight its centrality, presenting attention as spiritual, ethical, and intellectual all at once.

First, attention is like prayer; they share the same degree.⁶⁸ This leads to the first condition in the attention process, faith, which is indispensable.⁶⁹ Weil frequently compares it to prayer: 'the orientation of all the attention counts for much in the quality of the prayer,' and true prayer occurs when 'the whole attention is turned towards God.' Faith, therefore, is its first condition. She illustrates this with the biblical assurance that 'if we ask our Father for bread, he does not give us a stone,' explaining that attention is 'a unique way of waiting upon truth'.⁷⁰ Through such prayerful attention, we resist the pull of gravity, opening ourselves to grace and enlarging our capacity to receive it.⁷¹ Thus, attention is a spiritual exercise.⁷²

The second condition is to take great pains, 'taking great pains to examine squarely and to contemplate attentively and slowly each task we have failed'.⁷³ Like resisting the force of gravity, attention demands that we face the temptation to turn away and instead fix our gaze steadily, with humility and honesty.⁷⁴ Roberts uses openness and risks to capture such an understanding.⁷⁵ Attention requires our openness to clear the ground of grace to whatever might follow from decreative acts of humility. For example, humility may seem the simplest thing in the world, but it is often the most difficult for our ego, the force of moral gravity. So openness involves a willingness to accept risks, the risk of having our current understanding of the world overturned, the risk of apparent failure and the risk of suffering and despair.

Third, attention is an intellectual practice. Weil cautions that true attention is less about effort than about waiting.⁷⁶ She uses the example in class: paying attention is an immediate muscular effort; our eyes, muscles, and nerves will suddenly respond to the command, but after two minutes, students will lose attention and forget the entire thing.⁷⁷ By arguing this, she further states, "attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty and ready to be penetrated by the object [...]"⁷⁸ When paying attention, our thoughts should be empty and waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive the object that penetrates it in its naked truth form.⁷⁹ Theologically, she points out that we do not obtain the most precious gifts by searching for them but by waiting for them.⁸⁰ Just as Christ emptied himself and first reached out to humans with his grace, we, by implication, did not obtain it through searching for it but by waiting for it. Weil also uses the eschatological view to interpret waiting, 'we faithfully wait while the master is absent, watching and listening and ready to open the door to him as soon as he knows'.⁸¹

We have borne the thought that Weil's attention is defined by her actions and reflections. As Romina Gurashi notes, Weil could not think about war only in terms of its outcomes; she believed it had to be judged by the means it employed.⁸² She therefore dismantled the very mechanisms of military struggle, analysing the social relationships it

⁶⁸ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 61.

⁶⁹ Weil, 63.

⁷⁰ Weil, 68.

⁷¹ Roberts, 'Education and the Ethics of Attention', 274.

⁷² Roberts, 274.

⁷³ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 64.

⁷⁴ Weil, 64–65.

⁷⁵ Roberts, 'Education and the Ethics of Attention', 275.

⁷⁶ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 65–69.

⁷⁷ Weil, 65.

⁷⁸ Weil, 67.

⁷⁹ Weil, 67.

⁸⁰ Weil, 67.

⁸¹ Weil, 68.

⁸² Gurashi, *Pathways of Peace*, 35.

created under specific technical, economic, and political conditions. In this way, Weil's attention was not abstract but practical — a disciplined watching, listening, and waiting that informed her concrete response to the structural injustices of her time. This also resonates with her analysis of force, the external power that dehumanises, and of necessity, the inescapable limits of life, both of which demand a response shaped by attention and, ultimately, by grace.

Indeed, for Weil, Christ himself gives the most remarkable example of attention. It is through love that he embodies this principle, and through God's attentive love for us that we learn to turn our attention to others. She puts it, "Not only does the love of God have attention for its substance; the love of our neighbour, which we know to be the same love, is made of this same substance"⁸³ In this way, Weil sees gravity as representing the innate human inclination towards self-centredness and self-interest, pulling us towards egocentric behaviour. Yet decreation is the process of letting go of the ego, and this requires focused attention and humble awareness that transcends self-centeredness. Moreover, Weil believes that attention to the needs enables us to connect with God, ourselves, and others deeply. This facilitates goodness. By this, we eventually experience grace, the sense of calm and tranquillity amid hardship. For Weil, her whole concept of attention lies in the life of Christ, as she concludes, 'Only he who is capable of attention can do this'.⁸⁴

Comparative Analysis

Weil's Christian Outside the Church and Wesley's Catholic Spirit

As Roberts observed, Weil does not align strictly with any single philosophical tradition, instead drawing from a wide range of sources. This openness helps explain her decision to remain outside the institutional Church, which she feared could act as a collective body that suppresses individual conscience and true attention to God. For Weil, belonging to such a collective risked compromising the purity of faith and the freedom to seek truth. She therefore refused baptism into Catholicism and distanced herself from her Jewish heritage, rejecting what she saw as the burden of racial or religious privilege. In this way, her stance embodied a search for a more inclusive expression of the Christian spirit.

Wesley's sermon on 'Catholic Spirit' underscores this inclusivity, advocating for unity and love among all believers. David M. Chapman's *Methodism and the Future of Ecumenism*, drawing on Robert Newton Flew, argues that Methodism's defining characteristics, especially its emphasis on holiness, were authentic features of apostolic Christianity so that this sermon serves to have a relationship with Methodist ecumenical inception.⁸⁵ So, in the strictest sense, any hostile attitude towards our neighbour is considered 'outdated'.⁸⁶ To highlight, the Catholic Spirit, for Wesley, is rooted in the early Christian church's emphasis on unity and love, drawing from scriptural principles such as those found in John 17:21, where Jesus prays for the unity of His followers. He put it,

If, then, we take this word in the strictest sense, a man of a catholic spirit is one who, in the manner above-mentioned, gives his hand to all whose hearts are right with his heart: one who knows how to value and praise God, all the advantages he enjoys, concerning the knowledge of the things of God, the true scriptural manner of worshipping him, and, above all, his union with a congregation fearing God and working righteousness: one who, retaining these blessings with the strictest care, keeping them as the apple of his eye, at the same time loves-as friends, as brethren in the Lord, as members of Christ and children of God, as joint partakers now of the present kingdom of God, and fellow heirs of his eternal kingdom—all.⁸⁷

⁸³ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 68.

⁸⁴ Weil, 70.

⁸⁵ Robert Newton Flew, 'Methodism and the Catholic Tradition', ed. N. P. Williams and Charles Harris, *Northern Catholicism: Centenary Studies in the Oxford and Parallel Movements*, 1933, 519–20.

⁸⁶ David M. Chapman, 'Methodism and the Future of Ecumenism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 451–52.

⁸⁷ John Wesley, 'Sermon 39: Catholic Spirit', in *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 2: Sermons, II, 34-70*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 2, The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 94.

Therefore, the Methodist reading emphasises issues important for the church and individual Christians in their response to God's grace and responsible living in the world. Brian E. Beck, who expanded Wesley's Catholic Spirit in his research of the identity and the heritage of a Methodist, suggests that a Methodist reading can be enhanced by diverse readings, such as liberal, feminist, Confucian, and more.⁸⁸ He underscores that Methodist heritage and identity are linked not only to the topics discussed in ecumenical dialogues but also to the conversations of Methodists from different parts of the world when they gather. For example, the purpose of the Oxford Institute from which this paper emanates is to gather people away from the contexts that define them day to day.⁸⁹ So, by far and near, the Catholic Spirit remind us not to be trapped in the ways that distort us, mainly if we are the "church-going" type Methodists. In short, the Catholic Spirit, for Wesley, is a spiritual and practical unity that emphasises the love of God and neighbour as central to the Christian life; this aligns with Weil's intention to love the neighbour. Cracknell, White and Albert C. Outler once claimed that John Wesley was a great ecumenist.⁹⁰

The Trinitarian Framework of Prevenient Grace in Dialogue with Weil's Gravity, Decreation and Grace

The Trinitarian framework in Methodist theology highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in imparting grace prior to salvation, underscoring both the unlimited reach of God's grace and our call to confront systemic social problems. Although Weil does not use a Trinitarian approach, her ethical theory of gravity, force, necessity, decreation, and grace runs parallel to the Spirit's work in addressing sin and injustice. For her, gravity means the human tendency toward selfishness and the easier path. Force refers to external powers that crush human dignity and treat people as objects. Necessity points to life's unavoidable limits—such as hunger, illness, and death—that strip away illusions of self-sufficiency. Together, these describe the fallen human condition into which prevenient grace enters. The Holy Spirit thus makes us aware not only of personal sin but also of the structural forces and unavoidable limits of life that diminish human dignity, and opens us to the grace that leads to repentance, faith, and renewed life.

Weil's idea of grace connects with Tyson's view of prevenient grace, which cannot be separated from repentance and faith, both of which reject selfishness and domination. For Weil, though, repentance and faith must also be seen in light of force — the powers that crush human dignity — and necessarily — the limits of life, like hunger, illness, and death, that strip away the illusion that we are self-sufficient. These show the pull of gravity and the need for decreation, the letting go of the ego, through which the Holy Spirit guides and draws us into grace. The Cross shows this clearly: just as Christ bore suffering to overcome force, so grace helps us face suffering with love and humility.

Yet there is a key divergence. Weil's interpretation of grace does not include the creative dimension found in the Methodist tradition, which understands prevenient grace as God's innovative and omnipresent work of salvation. Instead, she locates God's presence most profoundly in suffering. While she acknowledges that we may encounter God in joy, in love of neighbour, in religious rites, in great art, and in the beauty of the natural world, she insists that it is above all in affliction that God is most deeply known. For Methodists, grace is a gift, creating new possibilities and restoring us in the image of God. For Weil, by contrast, grace is the attention of Christ himself — experienced not as a gift possessed but as a summons to share in suffering with compassion. This perspective, informed by her mystical experiences and rejection of moments of enjoyment even in peace, suggests that collaboration with God involves sharing in suffering. Therefore, where Methodist prevenient grace points to God's universal and creative initiative, Weil's gravity – decreation – grace focuses on practical efforts to aid those in need rather than seeking creative expressions of grace. Consequently, this observation leads to the last comparative point here.

Optimism of Grace and Weil's Suffering

Cracknell's 'Optimism of Grace' and Weil's suffering as a pathway to grace present different atmospheres but meet in their interpretation of hope. In the case of Weil's rejecting her Jewish identity, she addressed the wider society of her time—a society that did not know itself, but instead believed itself to be Jewish. Perhaps we can understand

⁸⁸ E. Beck, *Methodist Heritage and Identity*, Routledge Methodist Studies Series (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 91.

⁸⁹ Beck, 91.

⁹⁰ Cracknell and White, *An Introduction to World Methodism*, 117.

these two in this way: creative attention means focusing on what does not exist, and doing good in uncertainty could be risky but creative. Weil's determination to stay outside the class and remain outside the church until her death can be understood as an innovative and creative way that speaks to the rigidity of religion and the domination of power in the turbulent society. Conversely, Cracknell's optimism is seen in the human capacity for struggle and is embodied in interfaith and ecumenical efforts. For Cracknell, 'Optimism of grace' is not about illusion but working with the Holy Spirit with hope rather than fear. Ultimately, this drives responsive grace and cooperation with God during uncertain times.

Implications for Pluralist Contexts

At the start of this paper, I mentioned passing by Wittgenstein's former residence in Cambridge, near Wesley House. That small encounter quietly set the story of this paper in motion. As a student in this highly scholarly town, I have been reminded, again and again, of the need to attend. This call to attention reaches into many dimensions of life—our local and global Methodist identity, our heritage, and our place within the wider human community.

Yet many ways keep us trapped in self-centredness, whether through religious, racial, or economic privilege. Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace and Weil's ideas of gravity, decreation, and grace shed light on how we can live faithfully in diverse contexts shaped by crisis and uncertainty. Both remind us that the challenges of our time often arise from this gravity and affirm that grace—whether preveniently offered by the Spirit or encountered through attentive response in suffering—opens us to God and one another. In the modern world, we can capture that racial, social, and economic prejudice acts as a new form of gravity and necessity, pulling us away from grace. As Harold J. Recinos points out, such prejudice denies the grace found in the truth that God 'made all nations of one blood'.⁹¹ Therefore, in a world marked by racial, cultural, and religious tensions, this urges us to develop attentiveness: to watch, to listen, to pray, and to respond with compassion to others' suffering, even when it is not our own. Grace, therefore, is not only a gift for individuals but also a call to oppose forces and demands that undermine human dignity and to collaborate with God in the pursuit of reconciliation and peace.

The theme of this 15th Oxford Institute from which this paper was originally given highlights, 'Glad Tidings of Salvation in an Age of Crisis'. Perhaps one of today's greatest crises is that we have lost the ability to love our neighbour, and another is that we struggle to imagine living outside the walls of the Church. Weil reminds us that if we cannot find calm and peace in a turbulent world, it is often because we have not truly experienced grace, remaining trapped in the gravity of self-centredness. Thus, this reveals that God's suffering and God's grace are inseparable.

Considering this, the spirit of the optimism of grace inspires us to live with uncertainty and makes such work possible whilst inspiring us not to give up on grace. It enables us to participate and work with God creatively out of our imagination. Weil often bears the titles 'Christian outside the church' and 'patron saint of all outsiders', and subsequently inspired us by highlighting the importance of acknowledging and addressing suffering that does not happen directly to us whilst making a serious effort to live in grace. God's glad tidings lie in His great pain and the creative, boundless grace he initially gave us.

Conclusion

This paper has explored how Simone Weil's concept of grace aligns with and challenges traditional notions of prevenient grace. It examined the dynamic within the definition of God's boundless grace and refines our responsibility to respond to his grace as a co-creator. In other words, exploring prevenient grace has much practical value that can be gained from God's activity in His world; whether He is the creator, governor, or sufferer, He bestows his highest grace upon us and invites us to work within him. Hence, grace is not a one-time occurrence. It requires us to try to listen and participate with God, and it stimulates us to show goodness throughout our lives

⁹¹ Harold Recinos, 'In a Divided World, Methodism Matters', in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 683. Harold J. Recinos writes based on Acts 17:26, 'From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live...'

continually. As co-creators with God, we are always expected to engage in ongoing creative work with God and to respond to his grace. The spirit of the optimism of grace inspires us to live with uncertainty, makes such work possible, and inspires us not to give up on grace in difficult times. Correspondingly, it enables us to participate and work with God creatively out of our imagination. The title that Weil bears, 'Christian outside the church' and 'patron saint of all outsiders,' inspires us by highlighting the importance of acknowledging and addressing suffering that does not happen to us and making a serious effort to live in grace. So, by paying attention to what is close and far to us, whether outside our class system, outside our church, or, as Beck puts it, outside the context that has trapped us, we can see how God unfolds the mystery and abundance of grace. It offers us a glimpse of what is never fully attainable and, in doing so, links us to something far greater and more significant. Even amidst a world of crises and suffering, we are fenced by grace.

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