

Simone  
**Weil**

## Gravity and Grace

First complete English language edition

With an introduction and postscript by  
Gustave Thibon

Translated by Emma Crawford and  
Mario von der Ruhr



London and New York

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# Gravity and Grace

**'One of the most profound religious thinkers of modern times.'**

*The Twentieth Century, 1961*

**'Time and again she pierces the veil of complacency and brings the reader face to face with the deepest levels of existence.'**

*Church Times*

**'We must simply expose ourselves to the personality of a woman of genius, or a kind of genius akin to that of the saints.'**

*T. S. Eliot*

**'The best spiritual writer of this century.'**

*André Gide*

**'The light Simone shines makes everything seem, at once, reassuringly recognizable and so luminous as to be heavenly.'**

*Malcolm Muggeridge*

**'In France she is ranked with Pascal by some, condemned as a dangerous heretic by others, and recognized as a genius by all.'**

*New York Times Book Review*



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Mario von der Ruhr

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## INTRODUCTION

I find it hard to make public the extraordinary work of Simone Weil. Hitherto I have shared with only a few special friends the joy of knowing her personality and her mind, and now I have the painful impression of divulging a family secret. My one consolation lies in the certainty that through the inevitable profanation of publicity her testimony will reach other kindred souls.

I find it still harder to be obliged, in introducing this work, to speak incidentally of myself. *Secretum meum mihi*: the absence of reticence among many modern writers, the taste for autobiography and confession, the habit of admitting the public to the innermost recesses of an intimacy stripped of all reserve have never failed to surprise and scandalize me. Yet I owe it to myself—were it solely to justify the appearance of my name at the head of these papers—to explain the exceptional circumstances through which I came to know the real Simone Weil and to have the undeserved honour of presenting her thoughts to the world.

In June 1941 the Reverend Father Perrin, a Dominican friend



then living at Marseilles, sent me a letter which I do not happen to have kept but which ran more or less as follows: 'There is a young Jewish girl here, a graduate in philosophy and a militant supporter of the extreme left. She is excluded from the University by the new laws and is anxious to work for a while in the country as a farm hand. I feel that such an experiment needs supervision and I should be relieved if you could put her up in your house.' I had to think this letter over. Thank God I do not suffer from any *a priori* antisemitism, but what I know from experience of the qualities and faults of the Jewish temperament does not fit in any too well with my own and is particularly ill-adapted to the demands of everyday life together. There is an equally wide divergence between my instinctive reactions and those of a militant supporter of the extreme left. Moreover I am a little suspicious of graduates in philosophy, and as for intellectuals who want to return to the land, I am well enough acquainted with them to know that, with a few rare exceptions, they belong to that order of cranks whose undertakings generally come to a bad end. My first impulse was therefore to refuse. The wish to fall in with the suggestions of a friend, an unwillingness to spurn a soul which Destiny had placed in my path, the halo of sympathy surrounding the Jews as a result of the persecutions from which they were beginning to suffer, and, on the top of all this, a certain curiosity, made me change my mind.

A few days later Simone Weil arrived at my house. At first our relationship was friendly but uncomfortable. On the concrete plane we disagreed on practically everything. She went on arguing *ad infinitum* in an inexorably monotonous voice and I emerged from these endless discussions literally worn out. I enveloped myself in an armour of patience and courtesy in order to bear with her. Then, thanks to the privileges of a life which is shared, I gradually discovered that the side of her character which I found so impossible, far from revealing her real deep nature,

showed only her exterior and social self. In her case the respective positions of being and appearing were reversed: unlike most people she gained immeasurably in an atmosphere of close intimacy; with alarming spontaneity she displayed all that was most unpleasing in her nature, but it needed much time and affection, and a great deal of reserve had to be overcome, before she showed what was best in her. She was just then beginning to open with all her soul to Christianity, a limpid mysticism emanated from her; in no other human being have I come across such familiarity with religious mysteries; never have I felt the word *supernatural* to be more charged with reality than when in contact with her.

Such mysticism had nothing in common with those religious speculations divorced from any personal commitment which are all too frequently the only testimony of intellectuals who apply themselves to the things of God. She actually experienced in its heart-breaking reality the distance between 'knowing' and 'knowing with all one's soul', and the one object of her life was to abolish that distance. I have witnessed too much of the daily unfolding of her existence to be left with the slightest doubt as to the authenticity of her spiritual vocation: her faith and detachment were expressed in all her actions, sometimes with a disconcerting disregard for the practical but always with absolute generosity. Her asceticism might seem exaggerated in our century of half-measures where, to use the words of Léon Bloy, 'Christians gallop with due moderation to martyrdom' (and, indeed, how great a scandal would be caused today by the eccentric practices of certain medieval saints?); nevertheless, it was free from any emotional excess and it was impossible to discern any change of level between her mortification and her inner life. Finding my house too comfortable, she decided to live in an old half-ruined farm belonging to my wife's parents and situated on the banks of the Rhône. Every day she came to work and, when she deigned to eat, she had her meals with us. Though delicate