The majority of Simone Weil’s writings were published posthumously after her premature death in 1942 of tuberculosis. The publication of her works in French in 1947, and soon thereafter in English, generated great interest especially during the 1950’s and 60’s. Her influence waned during the late sixties, but renewed interest in her writings developed since the nineties because of the postmodern and deconstructive tendencies in her thinking. Weil’s writings consist of personal letters, notes and philosophical reflections contained in notebooks. They were probably never intended to be published. Her writings on religion are thus not systematically ordered, but consist of scattered notes.

Rebecca and Lucian Stone make a laudable attempt to present us with insights into Simone Weil’s non-systematic religious thoughts. Their treatment of Weil’s theological reflections avoids parochialism by not only engaging with the illuminating aspects of her religious thought, but also making a serious attempt to deal with disturbing elements in her thought such as her rather simplistic analysis of Judaism and Islam. The scope of the publication is not limited to a transmission of Weil’s thoughts. The authors also enter into dialogue with various interpreters of Weil’s works, while her insights are simultaneously utilized to develop critiques of modern consumerist culture, distorted forms of religion and modern methods of teaching.

The introductory section attempts to find a point of orientation that can guide us to understand Weil’s theology and the nature of her writings. The authors suggest that Weil’s approach to the Gospels as containing a conception of life, not a theology, provides us with a possible point of entry to her own writings. Weil’s writings are poetic in ‘mission if not form’ and does not ‘communicate a theology but instead reveals a conception of human life’ (2). Typical of the poetic genre, Weil’s writings grant access to truths but denies the direct relation between thoughts and objects. Since her theological reflections refuses systematization and coherence, her theology could be characterized as ‘reflective-negative theology’ (5). In exploring the paradoxes in Weil’s thought, the authors state it as their aim not to resolve the tensions in her work, but ‘to make them more pronounced’ (7). This, after all, was the method that Weil herself used.

The first chapter discusses Weil’s confrontation with what she termed as the idolatry that underlies social-political injustice and the corruption of religion. Idolatry originates when the ego is oriented away from God towards the self. When this ego becomes institutionalized or collectivized the Great Beast
(oppressive ideologies) enters the frame. She accuses institutionalized religion of creating God’s image after the image of the human being by attempting to capture God through human language. Instead of attempting to capture truth, we must realize that truth is in its essence transcendent and therefore universal and eternal. Weil’s negative theological approach entails that she does not try to affirm or prove God’s existence, but that she begin with our human experience in the world. This leads Weil to a mystic orientation that renounces collective identities and opens her up to experiencing truths that surpasses intelligibility.

The second chapter analyses Weil’s Christology and her approach to religious pluralism. The authors state that Weil was unapologetically a Christian philosopher and that her worldview was shaped by the person of Christ. She was dismissive of future-oriented eschatological Christologies that are triumphalist and obsessed with Christ’s resurrection. Instead she regarded the suffering Christ on the cross as exemplary for humanity. Christ exemplifies ‘egolessness’. Christianity, therefore, is the ‘religion of slaves, not of victors and therefore masters’ (39). The second part of the chapter discusses Weil’s approach to religious pluralism and provides a critical discussion on Weil’s understanding of Judaism and Islam. The authors note that Weil leans towards assimilationism in her understanding of non-Christian religions as valid manifestations of transcendent truths. Yet, her ecumenical approach is absent when it comes to Judaism and Islam. She characterizes these religions as national and collective religions that promote hate. The authors accuse her of not paying due attention to the complexity of Judaist and Islamist teachings, thereby transgressing one of the fundamental principles of her own philosophy.

The third chapter discusses Weil’s notions of human nature and ‘de-creation’. Weil depicts God’s self-denial as consisting of two facets, namely God’s act of creation whereby God withdrew Himself in order to provide us with our existence, and secondly, Christ’s kenotic existence wherein he surrendered his divine omnipotence for the sake of experiencing human pathos. God’s distance creates a ‘void’, that is, a feeling of incompleteness and an insatiable hunger in us to find equilibrium. Since the human being is a created being that is a product of love, he experiences a desire to be loved and to love. To become authentic human beings we need to be de-created, that is, we need to destruct the “I” by de-centering ourselves. This unravelling of our identities opens up the possibility to true love and gift exchange between God and the human being.

The fourth chapter explicates Weil’s notions of love and detachment. For Weil love consists in two stages, namely a disciplining of our base desires that consist in self-affirmation and an orientation towards the good. By renouncing the controlling self we resist the temptation to turn away from the realities