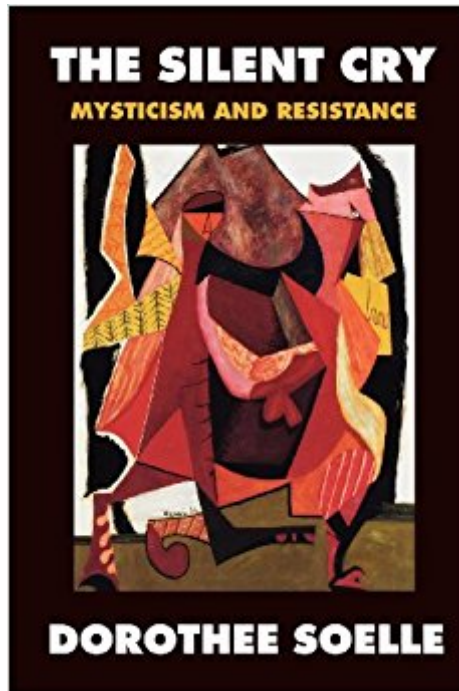




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The Silent Cry: Mysticism And Resistance



Synopsis

Exploring the religious impulse known as mysticism - the "silent cry" at the heart of all the world's religions. Mysticism, in the sense of a "longing for God," has been present in all times, cultures, and religions. But Soelle believes it has never been more important than in this age of materialism and fundamentalism. The antiauthoritarian mystical element in each religion leads to community of free spirits and resistance to the death-dealing aspects of our contemporary culture. Religion in the third millennium, Soelle argues, either will be mystical or it will be dead. Therefore, Soelle identifies strongly with the hunger of New Age searchers, but laments the religious fast food they devour. Today, a kind of "democratized mysticism" of those without much religious background flourishes. This mystical experience is not drawn so much of the tradition as out of contemporary experiences. In that sense, each of us is a mystic, and Soelle's work seeks to give theological depth, clarity, and direction. This, her magnum opus, conjoins Soelle's deep religious knowledge and wisdom with her passion for social justice into a work destined to be a classic of religious literature.

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Customer Reviews

From the Foreword (pre-publication version): "What is more splendid than gold?" asked the king. "The light," replied the serpent. "What is more refreshing than light?" the former asked. "Conversation," the latter said. "Goethe, 'The Fairy Tale' When I began writing this book, Fulbert Steffensky read the first pages of the manuscript and spontaneously made some critical comments. I responded and the following

spousal conversation ensued. Fulbert: What bothers me about mysticism is that it's really not something for simple folk. I can't imagine that my mother or my father could get anything from what you're trying to do here. Dorothee: (humming) Into his love [In seine Lieb versenken] I will wholly plunge myself, [will ich mich ganz hinab,] my heart is to be his [mein Herz will ich ihm schenken] and all that I have. [und alles was ich hab.] Fulbert: Piety, yes, but mysticism? Dorothee: I suppose that mysticism is always piety, even when it takes on utterly degenerate forms such as Satanic Masses. If I understand the meaning at all of this Christmas carol by Friedrich von Spee (1591-1635), then I can also talk about *synthesis voluntatis*. Your mother wouldn't have known what to do with that, but perhaps it could be useful to her clever grandchildren, who live without Christmas carols but not without philosophy. Fulbert: Back again to my mother. I believe that she can appropriate every sentence of the New Testament tradition as nourishing bread on which one can live a normal and burdened life. But what is she to do with the curious religious ingenuities of a Jacob Böhme, or John of the Cross? Surely, the Gospel itself deals more with the simple and sensible desires of people: to be healthy and not having to despair of life, to be able to see and hear, to live for once without tears and to have a name. It's not about spiritual artistry but about the possibility of simply living. Dorothee: But aren't mystics concerned precisely with the bread of life? As I see it, the problem is that people, including your mother, but certainly her children and grandchildren, encounter not just the Gospel but something that has been distorted, corrupted, destroyed and long been turned into stone. Mysticism has helped those who were gripped by it to face powerful but petrified institutions that conformed to society; it still helps them today, albeit in a manner that is often very odd. What you call spiritual artistry may figure in it, but the essence of mysticism is something very different. One evening, without knocking first, I entered your mother's room. And there she was, the old lady, sitting on her chair with her hands folded--no needlework! I don't know whether to call what she was doing 'praying' or 'reflecting.' But great peace was with her. That is what I want to spread abroad. Fulbert: Perhaps my reticence towards mystics is not meant so much for them as it is for a certain craving for mysticism prevalent in the present religious climate. The high regard for categories of religious experience is in an inflationary growth rate. The religious subject wants to experience the self without mediation, instantly, totally and authentically, in the manner she or he shapes personal piety. Experience justifies substance and becomes the actual content of religiousness. And then direct experience stands against institution, against the slowness of a journey, against the crusty, dark bread of the patient dealing with oneself. In this craving for experience, everything that occurs suddenly and is direct rather than institution-mediated becomes ever so interesting; everything

that's oriented to experience and promises religious sensation. I know, genuine mysticism is completely different from this. But that's how it's perceived. Dorothee: I'm also concerned when immediacy becomes the chief category. I think that the great figures of the tradition of mysticism have chewed on some of your crusty, dark bread. As Huxley once said, there is no 'instant Zen-Buddhism.' The 'now' of the mystics is an experience of time that is no common experience. This has nothing to do with a teenage sense of life, the 'right this moment' of wanting a certain kind of sneaker or ice-cream. I cannot agree with your covert pleading for the institution--as if the bread it baked were edible! I think there must be a third entity, next to vogueish 'religious sensation,' and the homespun institutions that are in charge of such things. You are seeking something like that yourself, except that you call it spirituality. Fulbert: When I speak of spirituality I always rule out the ideas of particularity and extraordinary experience. It's the name, more than anything else, that makes 'spirituality' so alluring. What spirituality itself actually is has much to do with method, order and repetition. It's a matter of constituting the self, in the midst of banality and everydayness. And everyone who is not utterly beaten down by life can work at it. Spirituality is not a via regia, an elevated pathway, but a via laborosa, a labor-intensive regimen for determining one's own vision and life-options. And so I stick doggedly to the notion that something is important only when it's important for everyone. But it's possible that in mysticism, what manifests itself in dramatically concentrated form and artistic expression, so to speak, is what constitutes the nature of piety and faith. This would mean that mysticism may in fact be neither the road of all nor of many. Rather, it may be that in poetic density the nature of a faith that is meant for all is revealed within mysticism. Dorothee: My most important concern is to democratize mysticism. What I mean to do is to reopen the door to the mystic sensibility that's within all of us, to dig it out from under the debris of trivia--from its self-trivialization, if you like. An older woman in New York told me about meeting a guru. When she told her black minister about this, he asked only one question. It's a question I too want to ask: 'Didn't he tell you that we're all mystics?'

Dorothee Soelle studied philosophy, theology, and literature at the University of Cologne and served as Professor of Theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York City from 1975 to 1987. Among her most influential writings are *Christ the Representative* (1967), *Suffering* (1975), *To Work and to Love* (1984), and *Theology for Skeptics* (1994). Soelle is a peace and ecological movements activist and lives in Hamburg, Germany.

So, enjoy this walk through a connection between mysticism and political action.

I've read through this book and really like the concepts presented by Soelle. She's a mystic and radical in the best sense. I'm reading it again, slowly to savor her astute observations. Definitely recommended reading for "followers" of Jesus, but it will upset most Christians...

This is by no means an easy read, but if you are a student of the Christian Wisdom tradition, a practitioner of Centering Prayer or a fan of Cynthia Bourgeault or Richard Rohr, you will be glad to explore this book, even if you can only get through a portion of it.

I'm enjoying the book. It came to me in perfect condition.

This is a work of great depth that will deepen your longing for the Divine. It may also lead you to question presuppositions we make in faith traditions. In this work, Dorothy Soelle speaks with the genuine voice of the mystic. We do well to leave the towers and edifices of religious institutions and journey to the wilderness to listen to such voices.

Dorothee Soelle writes fluently and goes to the point. She makes very simple to understand why mystics are so concerned with social issues. A must read if you are interested in the social aspects of the Church and Christianity.

An interesting integration of two paths.

My book club and I will love reading this book. Thanks for sending it in a timely manner.

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