

Dorothee Soelle

From the introduction to *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*

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What enticed me to the lifelong attempt to think God was neither the church, which I experienced more as a stepmother, nor exactly what mystics live on, nor the intellectual adventure of post-Enlightenment theology. I am neither professionally anchored nor personally at home in the two institutions of religion - the church and academic theology. It is the mystical element that will not let go of me. In a preliminary way, I can simply say that what I want to live, understand, and make known is the love for God. And that seems to be in little demand in those two institutions. At best, what Protestant theology and preaching articulate in what they designate as "gospel" can be summed up as follows: God loves, protects, renews, and saves us. One rarely hears that this process can be truly experienced only when such love, like every genuine love, is mutual. That humans love, protect, renew, and save God sounds to most people like megalomania or even madness. But the madness of this love is exactly what mystics live on.

What drew me to mysticism was the dream of finding a form of spirituality that I was missing in German Protestantism. What I was seeking had to be less dogmatic, less cerebral and encased in words, and less centered on men. It had to be related to experience in a twofold sense of the word: how love for God came about and what consequences it has for life. I was not looking for what Thomas Müntzer refers to as "made-up, fictitious faith," that is, something that is fine for the head and keeps the institution functioning. Instead, I searched for the mystical element of faith-in the Bible and other sacred writings, in the history of the church, but also in the everyday experience of lived union with God or the divinity. The distinction between the ground of being perceived in personal terms, or, in transpersonal terms, need not concern us here. For are "mindfulness" or "pure attentiveness" of Buddhist tradition not other words for what the Abrahamic traditions call "love for God"?

Often an expression like "longing for God"-which could be a different rendering of "mysticism"-evokes embarrassment; yet, tradition declares that our greatest perfection is to need God. But it is precisely that longing that is taken to be a kind of misguided indulgence, an emotional excess. In recent years, when two of my friends converted to Roman Catholicism, I could not approve. In the first place, the denominational divisions of the sixteenth century are no longer substantive for me.

Second, in the Roman institution - with its unrelenting "no" to women, to a humane sexuality, and to intellectual freedom - I only find in double measure the coldness from which both my friends were fleeing. But what these two women were seeking they found, above all, in the liturgy of the Catholic Church. The experience of mysticism made them feel at home. That is what I am looking for, too, and that is what this book is about. The history of mysticism is a history of the love for God. I cannot conceive of this without political and praxis-oriented actualization that is directed toward the world.

At the beginning of the seventies, I wrote *Death by Bread Alone* (Die Hinreise), a book with autobiographical undertones. Many of my friends on the political and Christian left became worried. "Dorothee is leaving," I heard them say in Holland, "will she ever return?" But that was not my worry; what I was particularly trying to do was to hold together what Roger Schutz, the founder of the Protestant monastic community in Taizé, calls "hate et contemplation" (struggle and contemplation). I did not want to travel on two distinct pathways. What in the late sixties we named "politicization of conscience," at the time of the political evensong of Cologne, has in the meantime become widely generalized. More and more

Christians and post-Christians understand the connection between setting out and then coming back again (Hin-reise and Ruckreise). [We] need both.

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