

Bin Song

Political Mysticism and Political Theology of Dorothee Soelle[□]

SUMMARY – Political theology is for Dorothee Soelle a theological hermeneutics, which emphasizes that the truth of a theological statement consists in its answerability to concrete situations in human history and in its transformative effect in praxis. With this idea, political mysticism is, on the one hand, Soelle’s historical research concerning the political dimension of Christian mysticisms, and on the other hand, Soelle’s presentation of her idiosyncratic version of mysticism, a modern mystical journey, that reacts against the institutional injustice and individual powerlessness that are inherent in the current political and economic order of global capitalism. Inspired by other mystic thinkers such as Simon Weil and Rudolf Otto, Soelle’s political mysticism could possibly be improved to become more adaptable and functional in contemporary society.

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Be united with God but do not withdraw from the world! Based upon this belief, Dorothee Soelle thinks mysticism can deeply motivate humans to engage themselves politically with their surroundings. The forms of this engagement can be, protecting the eco-system of the earth, boycotting consumerism, struggling for the oppressed and the marginalized in the global market economy, etc. If the power of political engagement and moral imperative which is contained in mysticism be released and fleshed out in human life, human beings can fulfill their specific status as co-creators. In the process, humans experience suffering while cooperating to continue the creation of the world, which is left unfinished by an all-loving, but not omnipotent God.

Although this idea of political mysticism is intensely argued in Chapters Five and Fifteen of Soelle’s major work of mystical study, *The Silent Cry*, its repercussions and the theological points that support it are in fact everywhere. Thus, the question that ought to be addressed at the outset is whether this idea of political mysticism is a reliable representation of the character of mysticisms in history, or just one constitutive ingredient of Soelle’s own theology. Similar questions have been posed by other scholars. Anne M. Clifford thinks that this uniform view of mysticism overlooks the diversity of historical situations, where different mystics

• Much of this essay consists of portions of my term paper for the course ‘Pathway to God: Prayer and Christian Mysticism’, given by Dr. Cathy Mooney at Boston College 2014, and my term paper for the course ‘Theology of Christian Mysticism’, given by Dr. Ray Hart at Boston University 2013. I am grateful for their lectures which steer me into the study of Christian mysticism.

lived, and thus does not fully address the uniqueness of each mystic.¹ F. Matthew Schobert, Jr. doubts that mysticism ending in social abandonment without any subsequent reengagement may be a very common phenomenon; therefore, not all mysticisms have the function of social transformation as Soelle expects.² Both reviews point to the possible insufficiency of historical evidence to verify Soelle's idea. Nevertheless, although Soelle has carefully selected a considerable amount of evidence from historical and contemporary mysticisms, and provides these items of evidence with political interpretations, I assume that when Soelle ponders over and speaks of political mysticism, she acts more as a theologian rather than a historian.

At the beginning of the book, Soelle says, "with the word 'mysticism', I try in a twofold sense to name a process in which I find myself: the discovery of traditions of mysticism and their appropriation".³ It indicates that Soelle's understanding of mysticism stems from an appropriation of historical mysticisms in relation to the formation of her own personality, which fuses with the 20th-century social and political environment she was part of. In Gadamer's view, it can be inferred that Soelle's idea of political mysticism is the result of a particular hermeneutical circle, whereby Soelle brings her own horizon, with its questions, concerns, and struggles as they occur in her contemporary world, into the horizon of mystics in history that is manifested in various mystical texts and stories. These two horizons are then fused to engender answers to Soelle's own concerns. Actually, Soelle herself is quite aware of this hermeneutical undertone and she gives it solid form in relation to the theory of truth in her 'political theology'. According to Bultmann, Soelle thinks that a theological statement is true, not because its content expresses something that is timelessly valid; but rather, it is true when 'it gives the answer to the question posed by the concrete situation in the time to which the sentence itself belongs when it is being spoken'.⁴ Therefore, truth is not taught and accepted, but lived and practiced. Truth becomes true only when life is lived concretely and situationally, that is, when truth has been brought into a political context and has engaged itself sufficiently with it. In this sense, the criterion of truth is not something out of the world that can be approached in a speculative way, but praxis; a praxis that is intellectually enlightened, capable of transforming the present and leading to a promising future.⁵ Soelle defines political theology accordingly as 'theological hermeneutics', which opens a horizon of interpretation that understands politics as 'the comprehensive and decisive sphere in which Christian truth should become praxis'.⁶ Thus, if a scholar, as quoted above, doubts whether Soelle's idea of political mysticism is too personal

¹ Anne M. Clifford, 'Review of *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, by Dorothee Soelle', in: *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 3 (2003), 139-142: here 140.

² F. Matthew Schobert, Jr., 'Review of *Mysticism & Social Transformation*', in: *Journal of Church and State* 44 (2002), 846-848: here 848.

³ Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001, 4.

⁴ Dorothee Soelle, *Political Theology* (trans. J. Shelley), Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974, 22.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 72-76.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

and too one dimensional to be grounded in the diversity of historical mysticisms, Soelle will respond according to her view of hermeneutic truth in political theology. She will answer that this is the only way that historical mysticisms could make sense in the contemporary context. In addition, even if the scholar does not agree with Soelle's specific interpretation of some mystic thoughts in regard to their political implications at present, she or he must also propose her or his own interpretation. This interpretation would have to be correlated with the concrete political situation in which she or he exists, if it is to be counted as a relevant interpretation that leads to hermeneutical truth and transformative praxis. In this sense, the suspicious scholar must also be a political mystic or a political theologian in her or his own right.

Significantly, even if some mystics in history have indeed harbored a tendency to abandon the world without leading to any subsequent reengagement, this does not mean that there is no political context in which their mystical statements were grounded, or that these statements have no political repercussion by which human religious life will be subsequently influenced. In other words, human understandings are always tinged with a certain degree of ambiguity because of their idiosyncratic hermeneutical situations. In this sense, there is no situation in history that comprises of pure facts. No *tabula rasa* exists without any mixture of human understanding, and thus could pass away, exist-in-itself, or accordingly wait for later historians' objective investigation. Rather, I would state that mysticisms in history are the result of various hermeneutical circles, which are brought forward in distinct political situations and express different existential concerns, social struggles, and self-understandings of mystics. Thus, their meanings are always embedded and extended in a spiral which is open to indefinite space and time, and long for other mystics' further interpretation and appropriation. To define their political dimensions, therefore, is indispensable to the proper understanding of mysticisms in history. Even if these mysticisms cannot be defined as political according to the interpretation of Soelle, they are, in their own right, political mysticism. In fact, Soelle has noticed that the transformation of the world is anything but the only aim of mystics' thought and practice: 'They [mystics] lie between withdrawal from the world and the transformation of the world through revolution. But whether it be withdrawal, renunciation, disagreement, divergence, dissent, reform, resistance, rebellion, or revolution; in all of these forms, there is a No! to the world as it exists now'.⁷ This 'No' attitude towards the established order of the world, which is named by Soelle as 'resistance',⁸ has an inexorable political power. As a result, under different historical circumstances that power would be fleshed out in different ways. These ways, by no means, could be overlooked by any historian, because they are *ipso facto* part of history. Therefore, against the background of an objective and complete historical record of mysticism, we are more likely to see a meaningful and hermeneutically true interpretation that is branded with the interpreter's unique personality and the characteristics of her or his concrete political situation. Evidently, this preference ought not to diminish our adherence to the belief that a decent balance between facts and views, as well as, realities and interpretations, is always ideal for all kinds of

⁷ Soelle, *Silent Cry*, 3.

⁸ See footnotes 31, 32.

humanity studies, into which a historical and theological investigation of mysticism is subsumed.

Nevertheless, a hermeneutical investigation into the methodology of theological study and the human existential situation in history is only one of the reasons why Soelle insists upon the importance of the political dimension of mysticism. Soelle claims explicitly that 'we are all mystics',⁹ and furthermore, based on the solid reasons gained from the analysis above, she would claim implicitly that all mysticisms are political. I think a distinct knowledge of the nature of 'peak experience' in mysticism, which is generally regarded as the experience of mystical union, functions as a deeper rationale for these claims. As Carter Heyward and Anne Barstow have generalized, there are two distinct points in Soelle's mysticism in comparison with the traditional approach. First, the 'intense individualism of traditional hermetic practice' is absent in Soelle's mysticism.¹⁰ Instead, Soelle thinks that individuals can only fulfill their uniqueness and freedom in a network of relationship,¹¹ and that God, through God's incarnation in Jesus Christ, is also relational in his or her own term. Considering that 'God creates through and only through us',¹² we are *cooperator Dei*,¹³ who are always cooperating with God to continue the unfinished and unsummed creation. Second, the omnipotent God who creates the world, who stands over and beyond the world to monitor its functioning, and who whenever necessary, intervenes supernaturally in the causal network of the world, for Soelle, has long been dead!¹⁴ Instead, the one and only God who is represented by Jesus 'is vulnerable and limited in what she or he can do in the world and still be a loving God'.¹⁵ God suffers when humans suffer, God transforms the world when humans make efforts to overcome their own social and personal sins; thus, the transcendence of God is always immanent, continuously unfolding, and involved in a world-process. Therefore, neither the individuality of humans nor the identity of God refers to a fixed state of being. Heyward summarizes that 'Identity is not static. It is being formed'.¹⁶

Through these two distinctive points, Soelle's mysticism implies that God, the world, and human beings are correlational with one another and they are all changing and transforming through a ceaselessly creative process. If mystics feel united with such a God, the peak experience can neither be self-secluded, self-sufficient, nor static. Soelle states that 'what mystics call 'becoming at one' is never a possession that cannot be lost. What really happens in mystical union is not a new vision of God but a different relationship to the world - one that has borrowed the

⁹ Soelle, *Silent Cry*, 15.

¹⁰ Anne Llewellyn Barstow, 'Dorothee Soelle: Mystic/Activist', in: Sarah K. Pinnock (Ed.), *The Theology of Dorothee Soelle*, New York: Trinity Press International, 2003, 189-204: here 197.

¹¹ Soelle, *Political Theology*, 88.

¹² Barstow, 'Mystic/Activist', 191.

¹³ Soelle, *Political Theology*, 53.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, xi.

¹⁵ Carter Heyward, 'Crossing Over: Dorothee Soelle and the Transcendence of God', in: Pinnock, *The Theology of Dorothee Soelle*, 221-238: here 231.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 228.

eyes of God'.¹⁷ The statement means that the mystics' view of the world is vulnerable to continuous adjustment because of their underlying unitary experience with God. With the eyes of God, they see what is otherwise invisible: the oppressed, the marginalized, the imperceptible yet dominant social sin, and so on; and subsequently, they try their best to transform them. Soelle defines this side of mysticism as 'a mysticism of liberation',¹⁸ which leads to the forgiveness of sins through active and transformative engagement with the world. On the nature of the experience of mystical union with regard to its forgiving effect, Soelle further states that 'whenever it (forgiveness) is sought in the immediate experience of God – behind the backs of other men and without the laborious detour through the world – it destroys itself: the union breaks'.¹⁹ However, we are well aware that not all mystics share the same expression and understanding about their unitary experience with God. For example, whether or not to enjoy a dynamic view of God, Pseudo-Dionysius claims that every being is derived from, exists in, and returns to God; and thus, a dynamic circle from God to all living entities in the world, which is composed of its derivative and returning, as well as positive and negative parts, exists.²⁰ However, Dionysius quite explicitly states that God is omniscient, anticipates every existence; thus, 'He (God) is not in the midst of becoming. He will not come to be. No'.²¹ Therefore, the Dionysian circle is in fact closed and intrinsically static, not like an open spiral that marks off the radically dynamical nature of God. In some of his sermons, Meister Eckhart urges a total detachment. That means achieving an absolute inner immovability before the ever-changing outer world in order to imitate the omniscient and unbecoming God who 'does not undertake anything whatever afresh because everything is something already accomplished'.²² Eckhart also emphasizes, however, that there is always an inner impetus or desire for the Godhead to become determinate through the creation of determinate things in the world from its indeterminate and abyssal depth. He states: 'it is a sure truth and a necessary truth that God has such a need to seek us out (...) God can no more dispense with us than we can dispense with Him'.²³ In this view, Eckhart's God is not as considerably detached and immovable as the analogy with Pseudo-Dionysius might suggest. As for the relation of God to the world and the position of self in the experience of mystical union, the views of mystics are no less diverse. For example, St. Teresa of Avila's ecstatic experience brims over with love of God, in which both pain and happiness are so heavily interwoven that Teresa says only death could take the pain of love away and only

¹⁷ Soelle, *Silent Cry*, 292.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 280.

¹⁹ Soelle, *Political Theology*, 104.

²⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius, 'The Divine Name', in: *Complete Works* (trans. C. Luibheid), New York: Paulist Press, 1987, 49-131: here 56-61.

²¹ Pseudo-Dionysius, 'The Divine Name', 103.

²² Meister Eckhart, 'On Detachment', in: *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defense* (trans. & introd. E. College & B. McGinn), New York: Paulist Press, 1986, 285-294: here 289.

²³ Meister Eckhart, 'Woman, the Hour is Coming', in: *Meister Eckhart: Mystic and Philosopher. Translations with Commentary* (trans. & com. Reiner Schürmann), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978, 55-58: here 58.

death could make the soul enjoy its Good completely.²⁴ Thus, it should not come as a surprise if anyone infers accordingly that denial of self and abandonment of the world are the typical consequences of mystical experience. However, in the *Cloud of Unknowing*, the anonymous mystic addresses the aftermath of the unitary experience with God, poking the cloud of the unknowing, and being immersed in the pure nothingness of God. Hence, we would form one body with every being in the world through Jesus Christ because ‘Christ is our head and we are the limbs’, and ‘if one part of our body feels pain, all the other parts are tormented and distressed by it, or if one part feels well, all the remainder are comforted by it’, which is the genuine meaning of Christian charity.²⁵ Therefore, in reference to the two distinctive points of Soelle’s mysticism, a kaleidoscope of different views exists among mystics. The four examples previously mentioned indicate that maybe only the view of the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* is close to Soelle’s standpoint.²⁶ In a word, when Soelle claims that mystical union is not an immediate vision of God, but an ongoing active political engagement in the world with the eye of God, which leads to the forgiveness of sin and the emancipation of human beings from established social injustice, we can infer that this mysticism is characteristic of Soelle’s own personality, her own theology, and her own specific historical situation. We can state that this is another example of how mystical experience is always mediated. In this view, despite Soelle’s hermeneutical standard that all mysticism is political, her political mysticism is *sui generis*, with an idiosyncratic connotation that corresponds to her concrete life situation and answers her specific existential and social concerns.

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As previously stated, there is a good reason to celebrate Soelle’s insight that we are all mystics and all mysticisms are political. However, her political mysticism addresses her own specific hermeneutical situation. Thus, in order to fully clarify and assess this idea, it is necessary for us to address the following questions: What kind of hermeneutical situation does she face? What social and political issues concern her most? Could her political mysticism sufficiently deal with these issues?

Experiencing World War II, the post-war confrontation between East and West, and the domination of the global market economy, made Soelle believe that the most powerful enslaving factors in our time are, the alienation of human nature due to the power of consumerism over humans; the extreme Western individualism that makes people powerless to protest collectively against the alienating social

²⁴ St. Teresa of Avila, ‘The Book of Her Life’, in: *The Collected Works* (trans. K. Kavanaugh & O. Rodriguez), Vol.1, Washington D.C: ICS Publications, 1987 (2nd ed.), 15-365: here 251.

²⁵ *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works* (trans. A.C Spearing), London: Penguin, 2001, 50.

²⁶ Of course, this is only a historical comparison, not implying that Soelle’s mystical view has been significantly influenced by *The Cloud of Unknowing* in the logical sense. In contrast, what I do want to suggest is that Soelle’s distinct view of mysticism stands in line with the tradition of classical German idealism and contemporary protestant theology, as partially indicated in this paper by her adherence to Marx and Bultmann.

structures;²⁷ and the new colonialism, which is caused by the dominion of an exploitative capitalist global economy and is embodied in the oppressive injustice that has been experienced by developing countries such as those in Latin America.²⁸ Correspondingly, Soelle thinks that three features of the mystical praxis can be taken as remedies for these social diseases: 1) A firm commitment to union with God and to beings as God's creatures in the world can help people to 'let go' of the ego, which is the foundation of the capitalist economy and which also traps individuals in a powerless situation in the face of systematic injustice.²⁹ 2) Detachment from non-lasting existence and the resulting prioritization of spiritual over material can make people give up their obsession with "possessing" things, which is the pivot of consumerism, and allow people to 'be amazed' at being itself, which is the genuine mystery of existence due to things' createdness by God.³⁰ 3) The mystical love that urges one to care for one's enemy and thus, does not expect any reward, can be the foundation of 'non-violent' protest against any established systematic injustice, which Soelle thinks is the only viable way to transform the social sin.³¹ Accordingly, 'to be amazed, to let go, and to resist' are taken as the three stages of the contemporary mystical journey.³² These stages refer to specific social issues in our time and have specific political implications. The end goal of the journey, as illustrated above, is to change humans into people disciplined in compassion, capable of suffering together with the world, and able to fulfill their distinctive status as co-creator toward the continuance of the divine creation and transformation of the world.³³

The systematic effort exerted by Soelle to build up this very inspiring political mysticism is admirable. However, there are remaining issues in the system that have not been fully addressed. Obviously, after the final stage of the proposed contemporary mystical journey ('to resist'), no other constructive stage, which can rebuild what has been deconstructed, is evident. We acknowledge that political mysticism in Soelle's sense could strongly motivate people to challenge the *status quo* of the moral crisis and institutional injustice in a society. However, the distance from getting motivated to actual action, and from actual action to solid progress that can engender a good outcome, is considerable. If we analyze some of the instances of social movement to which Soelle thinks her political mysticism can be applied, we will find that what she proposes is more of a moral slogan and an indistinct practical strategy, rather than a solid method that could lead to the solution to the problems and the stable progress of the necessary social reformation. Specifically, she does not address the issue of whether the typical non-rational revolution of mysticism is compatible with the expected gradual progress in social construction. I do not quite concern myself with whether Soelle's political mysticism treats the diverse mysti-

²⁷ Dorothee Soelle, *Beyond Mere Dialogue on Being Christian and Socialist*, Detroit: American Christians Toward Socialism, 1977, 3-15.

²⁸ Soelle, *Silent Cry*, 191-195.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 209-232.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 233-258.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 259-278.

³² *Ibid.*, 93.

³³ *Ibid.*, 92-93.

cisms in history with justice; what I am doubtful about is whether this idea is too moralistic and idealistic to efficiently deal with the social issues, which Soelle expects to occur. The rest of this paper will take two examples from Soelle's works to address this issue and if possible, formulate improvements to her political mysticism.

When proposing her identity as a Marxist Christian, she states that what Marxism should learn from Christianity is the commitment to transcendence, that is, the 'capacity of creativity overcoming the given act of conditions in a historical situation'.³⁴ By contrast, what Christianity should learn from Marxism is that 'no longer can incarnation be understood as an event that happened once and was completed, but rather as a process of God's ongoing self-realization in history'.³⁵ In Soelle's view, the political mysticism of Christianity as interpreted above, together with Marxism that originates from a harsh criticism of the unjust alienating structures of capitalism, can challenge the established capitalistic economic and political order and as a consequence, can emancipate humans from its yoke. However, we are aware that the problem is not simple. First, a very dangerous utopian element exists within Marxism, which aims to create a perfect historical and social status through human efforts. Generally, the creation is implemented through a revolutionary way that has the potential to sacrifice the diversity of individuals and any possibility of realistic and progressive improvement of social structures. Sometimes, this element can be furthermore grafted into Christian eschatology. As a result, the typical Christian mystical experience of a blissful union with an absolute and without-remainder good God hits its crescendo in the form of an even more powerful religious-social utopianism. In Soelle's political mysticism, no statement explicitly addresses this issue or cautions against the danger.³⁶ Second, when talking about the economic model to possibly replace the current unjust one, Soelle states 'there is no democracy without the democratization of the economy towards communal planning and acquisition of the collectively produced wealth: no democracy without socialism'.³⁷ We are aware, however, how intense the debate is about the pros and cons of planned economy versus market economy, even among people who are not professional economists. Despite the ambiguity with regard to the economic model that Soelle is referring to in the above quotation, it can be discerned that the model ought not to be the one used by the Soviet Union or China before its market-oriented economic reformation because the communally planned economy in those countries has been proven as futile, even devastating. Thus, if political mysticism aims to resist and overthrow the unjust *status quo* of economic order, what is its substitute? What is the positive and constructive dimension of political mysticism that is, as Soelle

³⁴ Soelle, *Beyond Mere Dialogue*, 17.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁶ In the context of political theology, Soelle thinks that the critical rationality embodied in Bultmann's methodology of demythologization could guard against the utopian tendency inherent to theology to avoid reality (Soelle, *Political Theology*, 3), but I am not sure whether this insight could be taken as a response to the issue in relation to the Marxist-Christian dialogue.

³⁷ Soelle, *Beyond Mere Dialogue*, 21.

claims, not only a mystical theory but a political praxis? Perhaps, someone will protest against our suspicion and argue that Soelle is a theologian, and not a politician nor an economist; thus, it is unnecessary for her to ponder over these kinds of questions. However, according to Soelle's standard, there is no rigid boundary between these disciplines, and even if she cannot provide a detailed social road map for economic and political development, she must point out how her idea of political mysticism can accommodate a progressively viable one.

Our second example comes from Soelle's review of Henry David Thoreau's 'Civil Disobedience'. When he stayed at Walden and occasionally walked to the town of Concord, Thoreau was arrested one day on his way to a shoemaker because he had not paid the poll tax for six years as a protest against the toleration of slavery. Thoreau refused to cooperate and stayed in prison longer than the actual sentence. Afterwards he wrote a pamphlet to declare and urge that 'under a government which imprisons people unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison'.³⁸ This is taken by Soelle as an example of non-violent protest, which is spiritually grounded in mystical union where the boundary between I and non-I finally melts away and a genuine universal love becomes possible. Soelle appreciates that Thoreau did not wait for the normal schedule of democracy to vote for changing the legislation, but took immediate action of resistance in the face of his government's ongoing unjust behaviors. Soelle thinks that this immediate action is also a result of the political power of mystical union, suffering together with the oppressed and giving in to the impulse to take action to transform. In relation to Thoreau's impatience and disbelief in the normal democratic schedule, Soelle comments: 'But this waiting, this mere being of a different opinion, this nice democratic belief in the power of argument and persuasion is not enough'.³⁹ I think, however, that non-violent protest in the form of demonstration, mass movement, or Thoreau's civil disobedience without a firm commitment to argument and persuasion is not enough either to accurately detect or sufficiently deal with social problems. Not all social issues are highly imminent so as to be susceptible to a revolutionary solution, and not all revolutionary actions can lead to a complete one-time resolution of the targeted social issues. Sometimes, we need to resort to a long-term democratic negotiation, cooperation, and especially to the power of argument and persuasion to take discreet action in order to achieve social progress in a solid yet sometimes quite piecemeal and accumulative way. In this view, Soelle's non-violent protest, as one most important practical strategy of political mysticism, seems too idealistic in regard to its proposed effect of resisting the established political order and positively treating social issues. She did not explain how the typical non-rationality of mysticism can be compatible with the spirit of rational criticism and persuasive argument upon which the democratic and progressive process of social reformation heavily relies.

Nevertheless, I believe that these *lacunae* in Soelle's thought are not irremediable. With further reflection and improvement, her political mysticism can be

³⁸ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden or, Life in the Woods, and On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*, New York: Harper & Row, 1958, 260. This sentence is quoted by Soelle, *Silent Cry*, 264.

³⁹ Soelle, *Silent Cry*, 266.

deemed more adaptable and more influential in reference to the issues we have posed above. For the danger of utopianism in Marxism, the proper understanding of and emphasis upon the mystical dimension of Christianity, or religion in general, far from enhancing the danger, could nevertheless act as an antidote. Simone Weil states that ‘The great error of the Marxists and of all the nineteenth century was to believe that by walking straight ahead, one had mounted into the air’.⁴⁰ The statement means that the mystical union, a blissful experience of being uplifted onto the divine plane with a blessed feeling of perfect fulfillment of human nature as a result, can only occur instantaneously and vertically. Believing that an absolutely good society, as the perfect form of the fulfillment of human existence, could be realized through accumulative and progressive efforts in the horizontal direction of human history, is an illusion. Thus, the ultimate representation of human existence is not linear, as if all past and present achievements are to be assessed and calibrated by an indefinite and perfect future, a utopia. In reality, the representation is cross-like. The enlightenment of ultimate values and the ultimate fulfillment of human nature achieved in spiritual exercise on the vertical dimension will deeply motivate and persistently guide human beings to keep fighting with all their defects and limitations that are never absent in the horizontal dimension of actual human life.⁴¹ Therefore, I think that one of the most important functions of political mysticism is its corrective force in relation to Marxist or Marxist-like utopianism. As long as the two dimensions of human existence, namely, the vertical as the infinite and the horizontal as the finite, are differentiated, Marxism can be grafted well onto the Christian faith. These two ideals can work together to change and transform the ever-not-perfect world, with global capitalism as a new form of colonialism being one dimension of this transformation. In other words, in a democratic society with a market economy as its politico-economical backbone, a spiritual person who identifies her or himself as a Marxist Christian, as what Soelle has done, can definitely find her or his intimate position, as what Soelle has proven.

As to the question of compatibility between the radical non-rationality of mysticism and the rational criticism and persuasive argumentation that is required by a progressive democracy, adopting the idea of ‘the wholly other’ of Rudolf Otto, also a well-known mystic and Christian theologian, may be helpful. The reason why Otto calls one dimension of what is holy as ‘the wholly other’ is that, he finds that in a special human ‘numinous consciousness’,⁴² what is holy in reality is felt and revealed as something ‘which is quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar, which therefore falls quite outside the limits of the ‘canny’, and is contrasted with it, filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment’.⁴³ Thus, the

⁴⁰ Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* (trans. E. Craufurd), New York: Putnam, 1951, 47.

⁴¹ This general view of human existence also resonates with Paul Tillich. Cf. Paul Tillich, ‘The Political Meaning of Utopia’, in: *Political Expectation*, New York: Harper & Row, 1971, 125-180.

⁴² Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational* (trans. J.W. Harvey), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967 (2nd ed.), 113.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 26.

whole otherness of what is holy consists of the idea that its real tremendous power could be felt and known, but cannot be fully understood. Consequently, a clear conceptual expression could not be provided. There is always something more in what is holy in contrast with its conceptual schematization in the human mind. However, the “more” is meanwhile always set off and highlighted by the continuous human effort to schematize it conceptually. In other words, in relation to humans, the holy both repels and attracts. The repelling aspect can be schematized by means of rational ideas, such as justice, morality, will, and the exclusion of what is opposed to morality; the attracting aspect can be schematized by the ideas of goodness, mercy, love, and becomes all that is meant by grace.⁴⁴ Although what is holy, as ‘the wholly other’, is the foundation of all human religious ideas and feelings, its relationship with its rational schematization is like warp and woof that interweave in the same fabric of human religious consciousness.⁴⁵ In a word, what is holy as ‘the wholly other’ is neither contrary to reason, nor above reason. More precisely, what is holy is non-rational, and ungraspable by human conceptual understanding. Understood as such, the typical mystical and non-rational engagement with what is holy is not only compatible with rationality and argumentation; indeed they are entailed in one another. The non-rationality of the experience of mystical union needs to be brought out and pinpointed in contrast with the continuous rational effort to understand it. Moreover, rational criticism and persuasive argumentation also require the level and direction set by the ultimate values, for instance, creation, compassion, and universal love, that are mystically experienced and spiritually confirmed. Therefore, I think that mystical union, together with the resulting universal love, which urges respect and care for one’s enemy, is not only the foundation of non-violent protest in the non-democratic and non-argumentative way as conceived by Soelle, it is also the foundation of the alternative. No human action is more non-violent than resorting to rational criticism and persuasive argument to resolve conflicts among individuals and groups in a society. Nevertheless, violence can not only be of the body, but also of language. Frequently, rational argument deteriorates into an occasion of emotional eruption and verbal attack, which leads to nowhere. The universal love and the intellectual humility released from mystical experience could accordingly function as an underlying spiritual power to guarantee against the abusive and violent use of language in an argumentative process. In this sense, political mysticism is also the foundation of a well-functioning democracy.⁴⁶ I hope mystics, referring to all of us

⁴⁴ Ibid., 140.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 46-47.

⁴⁶ The non-rationality of mystical engagement with ultimate reality is not irrational, but actually pro-rational. This political implication of mysticism is extremely helpful for us to think over the recent debate of the freedom of speech which was triggered by, for example, the horrendous terrorist attack to the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in 2015. For the terrorists, I would say to be religious means to love one’s offender, however non-rational this love seems. Therefore, to persecute someone’s speech for the sake of religion has already betrayed the impiety of the persecutor. However, for the satirists, I think it is not decent to show disrespect towards all the people under the same religious category just because of the misbehavior of some individuals. If an artist enjoys more sympathy towards religion in general, especially the mode of life of mysticism, his or her speech could be

essentially, can be either revolutionary or progressive. We can make timely decisions whether to protest on the street or argue in the congress hall and execute the choice unflinchingly. After all, God unites everything; thus, all of these are mystical moments!

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In a hermeneutical way, Soelle's idea of political mysticism does not only point out methodologically and existentially that we are all mystics, and all mysticisms are political: Deeper analysis shows that the idea is the characteristic of her own personality and should be counted as a constitutive element of her own theology, a post-Bultmann political one that emphasizes the immanence of God's transcendence and the specific status of human beings as *cooperator Dei*. In relation to the structure and content of Soelle's political mysticism, the proposed modern mystical journey correlates itself closely with the institutional injustice and individual powerlessness that are inherent in the current political and economic order of global capitalism. The journey is a gadfly or a goad that alerts us to these new forms of irrevocable finitude in human life, and stimulates us to render our best efforts to transform it with a transcendent commitment to mystical union. With further reflection, especially if inspired by Simone Weil and Rudolf Otto, we can envision that Soelle's self-identification as a Marxist Christian may be more adaptable and functional in contemporary society. Furthermore, her political mysticism, with firm insistence upon non-violent resistance as context, can also be considered as the bedrock of a well-functioning democratic polity.

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more rational, and thus more transformative. A scholarly reflection of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack could be found in Didier Fassin, 'In the Name of the Republic: Untimely Meditations on the Aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* Attack', in: *Anthropology Today* 31 (2015) no.2, 3-7.

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