

The main revelation I encountered in the readings was the corrective and humbling nature of symbolic thought. The ambiguous, risky nature of symbolic thought is a necessary corrective against the idolatry of closed systems of belief.

The notion that a symbol can become irrelevant is important and I think we can see some forms of symbolic thought dying before our eyes. Those with deep historical roots seem to be less perishable and I liked the point that Tillich makes that they can't be arbitrarily created. They grow organically out of our joint life experience; an unending corporate life experiment that tests itself again and again for relevance.

The definitions used by Rahner of symbolic thought reminded me of greatly of poetry and McKenna's acknowledgment of the "modern" difficulty with symbolic thought of T.S. Elliot's oft quoted idea of the "dissociation of sensibility" that he claimed effected English verse from the seventeenth century onwards. He suggests "a thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility. When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience." ("The Metaphysical Poets" in *T.S. Elliot: Selected Essays*, London: Faber, 1951, 287.) Whether you blame the Enlightenment or Low Church Protestantism (Elliot implicated Milton after all) for an over emphasis on intellect, the unhealthy compartmentalism of the modern mind is potentially healed by an acknowledgment of the necessity of symbolic thought where intellect and feeling can be merged.

This brings out the necessary tension between an individual's creative journey of faith and the tradition embodied in the Church. We must be creative, active participants in a sacrament for it to be worthwhile, yet a symbol is empty if it has no resonance with that tradition. Since the solution is lived rather than solved it needs no resolution. Functionally, though, since we learn best by experience but are therefore potentially limited to our small lives, the transference of masses of experience through joining in universal stories through participation in ritual is a life stretching experience.

Cupitt, as often, puts it well:

For us, then, the religious task has become the task of attaining true selfhood. The formation of a creative artist provides the best image in this task, and also an indication of its difficulty, for it often takes such a person some fifteen or twenty years of unremitting labour to find his true voice – and we have to do it not in art, but in life. We shall need help, the help of our vision of God and of Christ as God's self expression in human form, the help of rituals and of companions on the journey. (Cupitt, D. *The Sea of Faith* London: BBC, 1984.)