

**Razpravi**

Izvirni znanstveni članek (1.01)

BV 74 (2014) 2, 311—325

UDK: 27-528-276.63

Besedilo prejeto: 12/2013; sprejeto: 04/2014

*Slavko Krajnc***Liturgy and Tillich's theory of symbols**

*Abstract:* Liturgical signs introduce us to the world of faith and invite us to contemplate the source of life and to experience the divine mysteries. Signs and symbols, in the context of religion, express and represent transcendent reality, such that they make it possible for men and women to get in touch with it through their senses: vision, hearing, taste and smell. The great protestant theologian Paul Tillich has insisted on symbolic language in his reflection on theology as articulation of faith. His original theory of symbols enables us to more deeply understand the liturgy and truths that we celebrate in the liturgy. The goal of this paper is to present Tillich's definition of symbol and to analyze the qualities symbols have in terms of their essence and function. As an important means of communication of faith, liturgical signs have the qualities of symbol, which is why liturgy simply cannot exist without them. Signs and symbols make possible the experience of the presence of God. The sacraments introduce us in a special way to the mystery of Christ. Therefore the believer has the possibility of entering into dialogue with God through signs and symbolical acts as well. According to Tillich, symbols give access to the deepest reality, to the reality that underlies every other reality, namely the reality of the Holy. Symbols show the way to God, who is the "ultimate concern" for every human being; they can be the means of revelation of the truth that the ultimate fulfillment of human existence rests in God. The author of the article concludes his analysis by proposing a few points for the believers as to how they might come to a deeper understanding of symbolical language in the context of liturgy.

*Key words:* Understanding of liturgy, signs and symbols, Tillich's theology of symbols, language of faith, symbolism of liturgy, active participation in the liturgy

*Povzetek:* **Liturgija in Tillichova teorija simbolov**

Liturgična znamenja nas uvajajo v svet vere, prek njih smo povabljeni k spoznavanju izvora življenja in k doživljanju božjih skrivnosti. V okviru religije znamenja in simboli izražajo presežno resničnost, ki jo predstavljajo tako, da jo lahko človek doživlja s svojimi čuti: z vidom, s sluhom, z okusom in z vonjem. Paul Tillich, véliki protestantski teolog, je v svojem razmišljanju o teologiji kot artikulaciji vere vztrajal pri simboličnem jeziku. Njegova teorija simbolov je izviren način razmišljanja; omogoča nam globlje razumevanje liturgije in resnic, ki jih obhajamo v bogoslužju. Cilj naše razprave so Tillichova opredelitev simbola, analiza lastnosti simbolov z vidika njihovega bistva in njihove funkcije in pogla-

bljanje razumevanja simbolične govorice v liturgiji. Ker so liturgična znamenja pomembna govorica vere in imajo lastnosti simbolov, liturgija preprosto ne more brez njih, saj nam kot posebna govorica omogočajo izkušnjo božje bližine, zakramenti pa nas uvajajo v Kristusovo skrivnost; zato ima vernik možnost dialoga z Bogom tudi prek znamenj in prek simboličnih dejanj. Po Tillichu simboli omogočajo dostop do najgloblje resničnosti, in to do zadnje resničnosti, do tiste, ki je podstat vsake druge resničnosti, do resničnosti svetega. Simboli namigujejo na Boga, ki je za Tillichu »poslednja skrb« vsakega človeka; simboli morejo namreč biti sredstvo, po katerem se razodeva resnica, da je izpolnitev človekovega bivanja v Bogu. V implikaciji avtor te razprave ponudi nekaj predlogov, kako naj bi verniki dosegli večje zavedanje o simbolični govorici v okviru liturgije.

*Ključne besede:* razumevanje liturgije, znaki in znamenja, simboli, Tillichova teologija simbolov, govorica vere, simbolika v liturgiji, dejavno sodelovanje v liturgiji

Every religion expresses its own truths about divinity, personal God and the deepest reality of human being by verbal language and symbols as well. In this way, symbols are the means of expression for the invisible, divine reality that surpasses the concrete existential reality of this world. Symbols are a powerful means for shaping the human being on many levels. They address the totality of human existence, which is conditioned by ritual practice that man and women exercise every day maybe without being even conscious of it. Symbols are embedded in the profound structures of human existence (Martinez 2004, 13).

Especially after the council of Vatican II., the Church has been preoccupied with how to render liturgical language understandable and acceptable to modern generations. This is how *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* states it: »In the liturgy, the sanctification of man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which corresponds with each of these signs.« (SC 7) In the same way, the Catholic Catechism reaffirms the role of symbols and signs in liturgy: »A sacramental celebration is woven from signs and symbols. In keeping with the divine pedagogy of salvation, their meaning is rooted in the work of creation and in human culture, specified by the events of the Old Covenant and fully revealed in the person and work of Christ.« (CCC 1145) The role of the signs and symbols in the liturgy is production, transmission and apprehension of liturgical meaning (Hughes 2003, 118).<sup>1</sup>

In this paper, we intend to analyze the value of symbolism in the liturgy under the aspect of Tillich's theory of symbols. He is one of the most influential theologians of twentieth century, who brought to evidence the importance of symbols in the Christian experience of God and in the language of theology.

We can not agree with all theological affirmations of Tillich and we do not in-

<sup>1</sup> The Church documents make clear distinction between sign and symbol using the signs in correlation to the sacraments, and symbols concerning all other elements in the liturgy.

tend to enter into theological debate, because Tillich's theory is not acceptable for the classical Catholic teaching; as well we do not intend to argue on how the sacraments confer grace but we recognize that in his theory of symbol, Tillich gives us an important insight into the functioning of symbols as language of faith. Reflection on symbols in the liturgy enlightens our understanding of liturgy, in which language of symbols plays an essential role. We will try to realize it in two main steps: first we present the theory of symbol and then its application in liturgy with the synthetic result of our inquiry.

## 1. Tillich and his theology of symbols

Faith as being related to the question of human experience of brokenness, diminishing and death is considered by Tillich as »ultimate concern« (Tillich 1987, 14), which means the search for an answer to the mystery of existence. According to Tillich »God, is the answer to the question implied in man's finitude.« (11) Nevertheless »man's ultimate concern must be expressed symbolically, because symbolic language alone is able to express the ultimate.« (41)

The point of departure of every speech concerning God is human religious experience, this religious experience lived in different religions, in Judaism and Christianity, was first expressed by symbols, rituals and myths.<sup>2</sup> »Faith needs language, as does every act of the personality; without language it would be blind, not directed toward the content, not conscious of itself.« (27) Absolute transcendence of God requires the symbolic language about him, though even the symbolic language is not adequate to express the transcendent being and acting of God. Tillich is aware of the fact, that in theology we cannot omit the philosophical or abstract language. When we refer to the divine reality, not as given in religious experience but as expressed in theological reflection, we are forced to include conceptual language (Thatamanil 2009, 294–5). The discourse about God has to be a combination of non-symbolic language and a symbolic one.<sup>3</sup> According to Tillich we need symbolic language in our relationship to God. The liturgy provides

<sup>2</sup> Tillich speaks about the experience of God as about the feeling of being consumed: »The feeling of being consumed in the presence of the divine is a profound expression of man's relation to the holy.« (Tillich 1987, 20) Let us illustrate the affirmation of Tillich by the example of burning candle; by its consuming itself the candle becomes light; the candle expresses the consuming of life in the light of life, which is given by God; it points out to eternity. Another example is entering the sanctuary, which is symbolical dwelling place of God; in the realm of symbolic it means entering in the dimension of God's presence and his holiness.

<sup>3</sup> Tillich introduces the symbolic language in theology. Theology has the duty to interpret the symbols according to theological principles and methods ((Tillich 1987, 65). God is the »basic symbol« of the transcendent (51), but he has to admit that it is insufficient. »We must always say two things about him: we must say that there is a non-symbolic element in our image of God-namely, that he is the ultimate reality, being itself, ground of being, power of being; and the other that he is the highest being in which everything that we have does exist in the most perfect way.« (51) According to Tillich the qualities or attributes of God, (like: he is love, he is mercy, he is power...) can not be attributed to God in literal sense, but in symbolical; in the same way the affirmation of the acts of God like: »He has created the world,« »He has sent his son,« He will fulfill the world,« are symbolic (52).

us with this language and makes possible the communion with God and communion of the faithful among themselves.

Tillich names relationship between God and human being »correlation« and symbol is the expression of this relationship. »A religious symbol possesses some truth if it adequately expresses the correlation of revelation in which some person stands. A religious symbol is true if it adequately expresses the correlation of some person with final revelation.« (Tillich 1987, 65) The essential question to be answered to is how to achieve the highest awareness of symbols in the liturgical ritual; and the respect for the liturgy as renewed by Vatican II.<sup>4</sup> The goal of this paper is to stress the importance of symbolism in the liturgy with the help of Tillich's theory of symbols. Understanding of liturgical symbolism is connected to the respect for the wholeness of liturgy in the light of its symbolism.

## 2. Definition and the role of symbols in the liturgy

To be able to apply the concept of symbol in the liturgy, we need to consider how Tillich defines it.

### 2.1 Signs and symbols

Tillich's definition of symbol is conceived together with the delimitation of sign on the basis of the difference among them. Signs are the conventions in the system of communication and they represent significations in the context of meaning. Sign is an element of communication intended to represent or stand for something other than itself: a person, object, group, process, or idea. Every sign is a means of relationship between the vectors of communication (sender and recipient) and makes it possible to understand a certain meaning, which is beyond the materiality of the sign. There is nothing intrinsic or natural, between the color red and the instruction to stop, it is merely a convention (Folley 1997, 5). There is no direct relation between a red light and stopping car, but conventionally they are united as long as the convention lasts (Tillich 1987, 41). Signs point to the meaning that is beyond them. »Decisive is the fact that signs do not participate in the reality of that to which they point, while symbols do.« (41)

### 2.2 Difference between sign and symbol

The symbol represents something, which is not itself, it stands for something other than itself; his power is in the disclosed meaning. »Symbols have one characteristic in common with signs, they point beyond themselves to something else.« (41) »The difference between symbol and sign is the participation in the symbolized reality which characterizes the symbols« (45). Symbols point beyond their concrete existence and their materiality: »There are two fundamental levels

<sup>4</sup> The greatest concern of the liturgical renewal before the Vatican II, was to reestablish the new understanding of the liturgy and the sacraments, especially of the Eucharist, which would make possible the richer participation of the faithful in the liturgy.

in all religious symbols: the transcendent level which goes *beyond* the empirical reality we encounter, and the immanent level, the level which we find *within* the encounter with reality« (51).

Michel Scuarneac says, that sign and symbol are inseparable and they cannot be put into opposition. Sign's function is firstly to inform, make understand, to explain; while symbol seeks to establish a relation between the persons that communicate among them, to exchange the ideas and entertain themselves mutually. In fact symbol does not put in relationship only the rational intelligence, but also and above all body and practical understanding, the intelligence of heart and sensibility. The logic of sign is to precise the meaning that is intended to be given to a particular reality, while the role of symbol is to unite the multiplicity of meanings: it is polysemic (Squarneac 2000, 12).

### 2.3 Definition and role of the symbol

The structure of symbol is essentially analogue to the function of symbol, which is that of putting broken – complementary parts together. One part of its reality is not enough to express the meaning. In its materiality it is not something absolute, but it points to the absolute and perfect.<sup>5</sup>

Lukken, whose conception of symbol is near to Tillich's, defines three kinds of symbol: »Three elements play a role in a symbolism: things, words and acts« (Lukken 1994, 98). By the use of certain *things* in a symbolic way something »breaks open« (88; 89). »We use *words* that call up for something of a deeper reality. And we *act* in a particular, loaded manner, so as to be able to open up space and admit something of a more distant horizon.« (89) In the symbol, the limited receives »infinite amplitude« almost »universality«. We may speak of »a direct, non-rational or incomprehensible communication with another reality.« (90)

Symbol brings together. Symbol unites past, present and future. (90) Paschal candle on the vigil of Easter brings together the hearts and thoughts of believers. The same symbol links us with the past event of Easter, and makes present the event of resurrection; at the same time it shows us the future namely our destiny, our resurrection.

## 3. Essential characteristics of symbol

Tillich enumerates six characteristics of symbol, which we are going to present situating them in the context of liturgy.

<sup>5</sup> The etymology of the word »symbol«: »To throw together«, »to meet and join«, »to meet in war«, »to encounter«, »engage with«, »to consult together«. The sense evolution in Greek is from »throwing things together« to »contrasting« to »comparing« to token used in comparisons to determine if something is genuine.« In way it becomes »outward sign« of something. Martinez defines the etymological origin of symbol saying: »It derives from the Greek *symballein*, meaning to place together the two matching halves of an object. In practice, two people would each hold a half and then be able to recognize one another by matching the two parts. Thus the *symbolon* would mediate their identity and guarantee the legitimacy of their relationship.« (Squarneac 2000, 13)

### 3.1 Irreplaceability of the symbols

Symbols cannot be replaced like signs for the reason of expediency or convention. (Tillich 1987, 41) The fact is that they concern a social group or religious community. There is a fundamental uniqueness in how they concern the reality they point to: The star of David can not be replaced, because it is intrinsically linked to Jewish identity so as the symbol of cross can not be replaced, because Jesus died on the cross. It means the uniqueness of symbols concerning a particular identity of a group. Symbols cannot be replaced like signs for the reason of expediency or convention because they participate in the reality to which they point (flag) (41–42). In all religions the temple is the central sacred place, it is considered as the residence of divine, in some way it is identified with the divinity. For example Jewish temple is the sign of the presence of God among his people and as such cannot be replaced because it is the central religious symbol of Israel; paradoxically it will be replaced in the New Testament with the body of Christ. In his turn the Body of Christ will be the place of redemption, which is irreplaceable and not only a symbol, but also a sacrament of salvation.

»By dying on the cross, Jesus Christ, who is the basic symbol of being-itself in Christianity, underlined the fact that symbols have their significance not in themselves but as manifesting the Ultimate.« (Reijnen 2009, 66) For liturgy it means: means that all the symbols, everything that is meant to have a meaning in whatever language, has to point to Christ and reveal him.

The words in liturgical and poetical language have a power that lasts through centuries. They have connotations in which they appear so that they cannot be replaced. We can take for example the Psalm 51, which we pray for the rite of penance or at the funeral, it has its place in this situation, because it expresses in the best way the situation of its author and ours too when we pray it sincerely.

### 3.2 Symbols as participation in the represented reality

According to Tillich, symbols participate in the reality they stand for. »The symbol represents something which is not itself, for which it stands and in the power and meaning of which it participates.« (Tillich 1987, 47) They participate in the power of meaning, which they represent. For instance, circumcision is one of the symbols, which make someone belong to the Jewish people, though not the only one. Symbol engages individual enabling him to participate in the basic quality of a group, the quality that produces the existence of a community of faith; for instance the quality of being »chosen people«.

### 3.3 Capacity of symbol to open up deeper level of reality

Symbols are the keys to different levels of human inner, social and religious life. According to Tillich the function of symbol is »to open up levels of reality, which otherwise are closed for us« (42);<sup>6</sup> an example from everyday life for this affir-

<sup>6</sup> The function of the symbol is »opening up of levels of reality which otherwise are hidden and cannot be grasped in any other way« (Tillich 1987, 47). Someone, who is far away from his home, feels well, when he sees a boat sailing under the flag of his own country.

mation is football match, when those who participate as spectators are involved more or less in the dynamic of the match, being in favor of one team or another. Symbols of one team or another are colors and forms on their dresses, flags etc. Tillich claims that there are different »levels of reality« (45); this is why we are able to seize material or spiritual reality only if we understand the language in which this reality discloses itself. Liturgy needs symbols that belong to the Christianity and constitute its meaning. Tillich sees the fundamental basis for his theory of symbol in the nature (*kosmos*) and human history or culture.

We agree with Tillich, symbol opens up deeper level of reality considering the question of death and burial of human body. Assisting to the funeral, praying for the deceased person has a ritual function of healing human soul bringing the relief in pain and putting it in front of God in faith; but all this is possible only in the communion with others: »Ritual awakens collectivity« as says Lukken (1994, 105). Symbols are opening up the mystery of life and binding us to this life, hidden in God.

### 3.4 Opening up the heart

Symbol does not open only the dimensions and realities that would otherwise remain unapproachable, »but also unlocks dimensions and elements of our soul which correspond to the dimensions and elements of reality« (Tillich 1987, 42).<sup>7</sup> Symbol opens up »the hidden depths of our own being« (42).<sup>8</sup> Tillich affirms that symbol does not open up only the exterior reality, at the same time it opens up human soul to this reality (48). In order to open up the reality exterior to human being, »something else must be open up – namely levels of the soul, levels of our interior reality.« (48) Something in human soul corresponds to the reality, opened up by symbol and represented by it.<sup>9</sup> According to Tillich »every symbol is two edged. It opens up reality and it opens up the soul.« (48) Music opens up human heart to participate in the creation, as author originally wanted it. The liturgy opens up human hearts, so that they participate in the ritual, in a way its author – The Church and through her Holy Spirit – desired. Namely, the liturgical texts and signs continually open up the hearts and invite to the dialogue with God.

Liturgical symbols being means of the liturgy dispose human mind and soul so as to be open to the mystery of Christ in his totality. The adoration of the Cross on Good Friday is not idolatry, but the way in which every participant is challenged to embrace Christ as Kyrios and his Lord. Sacrament of confession has symbolical value in coming of the penitent to the confessor; asking for confession; his

<sup>7</sup> Tillich was in dialogue with psychology; his theology had deeper allegiance with the theory of Carl Jung (Dourley 2009, 248–249). Exploring the pre-rational human subjectivity Tillich distinguishes between the archetypal ground of the symbol and the symbol itself, as the expression of this ground (249). Archetypal ground, can be considered as content of the symbol, is its substance; and it has common and human source in the collective unconscious of groups and communities.

<sup>8</sup> »Religious symbols open up the experience of the dimension of this depth in the human soul.« (Tillich, in: Leiner 2009, 46)

<sup>9</sup> Tillich speaks about the correspondence of levels between exterior reality and the reality of human soul. »The 'opening up' is a two-sided function – namely, reality in deeper levels and the human soul in special levels.« (Tillich 1987, 48)

confession of sins has first of all symbolical value as being sign, necessary for the matter of the sacrament. This real acts which have also symbolical value, are the means of opening up of the soul to God of the penitent; it is being realized not only on the level confessing the responsibility for the sins, but also and first of all on the level of faith in the celebration of the sacrament by which the grace of pardon is conferred.

### 3.5 The origin and producing the symbols

The fifth characteristics of Tillich symbol is that »symbols can not be produced intentionally. ... They grow out of the individual or collective unconscious and cannot function without being accepted by the unconscious dimension of our being.« (Tillich 1987, 42) Symbols cannot be invented by calculative deliberation (Thatamanil 2009, 296).

According to Tillich symbols are born out of »group unconscious«, which in some way produces the imaginary in the memory of a religious community, which is based on the historical events transmitted by the way of narrative. For example, symbols of Judaism are connected to the foundational events of Israel in his past (crossing of the Red Sea and salvation); we can affirm the same for Christianity whose symbols origin in the events connected to the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

»Collective unconscious« is the womb from which are born symbols (Tillich 1987, 48). We agree with Tillich that symbols cannot be produced intentionally, but at the same time we can perceive that there are certain needs brought about by social situations, which produce new symbols in the context of living Christianity. For instance charismatic or other movements in the Church have introduced their distinctive symbols. The logo of community »Faith and Light« is the boat of Noah.<sup>10</sup>

Symbols »grow out of the individual or collective unconscious and cannot function without being accepted by the unconscious dimension of our being.« (42) In fact there are unconscious dimensions where symbols are born and accepted,<sup>11</sup> but Christianity made a selective choice of symbols adopted in the liturgy. We may also affirm that liturgy represents the process of purification and rationalization in the use of symbols. But nevertheless Pope Francis in his Encyclical letter *Evangelii Gaudium* gives great importance to the »popular spirituality«, which is incarnated in the culture of the lowly (EG 124). This spirituality expresses the gospel value and evangelizes the people »more by way of symbols than by discursive reasoning« (EG 124).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> In the same community have the habitude of washing of feet, which is made not only on holy Thursday, but on other occasions also: like their anual retreats, and other gatherings. We see in this case, that in fact the symbol was not produced from nothing, but has its origin in the Bible, in the tradition, unconscious and in the conscious of Christianity.

<sup>11</sup> In the representations of Virgin Mary (paintings, statues) the snake at her feet represents negative reality of evil, death and sin.

<sup>12</sup> Among this symbolic religious symbols sees the rosary on the wall in the house, candle lighted in a

### 3.6 Dying of the symbol

One of the most important insights of Tillich concerning the question of symbol is its birth and its death; the possibility, that symbol disappears.

#### 3.6.1 Historical social situation

Symbols have meaning only if they are living symbols that connect us to life, which has origin in Triune God. The affirmation that interrogates liturgy in the modern world is the affirmation of Tillich concerning death of symbols. »Like living being, they grow and die. They grow when the situation is ripe for them, and they die when the situation changes.« (42) This fact does not concern only Christianity in western world. For different social and historical reasons Christians in Asia Minor have almost disappeared and many churches have become the mosques, like the Basilica Hagia Sofia. To become the Muslim place of prayer, all that reminded Christianity had to be taken away, the walls had to be covered by mortar. In this way Christian symbols have died at least in exterior way; as says Tillich: »...Symbols can only die if the situation in which they have been created has passed«. (55)

#### 3.6.2 The loss of transcendent dimension

»If the dimension of depth is lost, the symbols in which life in this dimension has expressed itself must also disappear.« (3) If the relation between the material part of the symbol and its spiritual reality to which it points ceases, a symbol dies, as Tillich claims: »a religious symbol can die only if the correlation of which is an adequate expression dies.« (65) If there is no »correlation« with the reality the symbol is void of meaning.

Tillich gives the example of »king« as symbol: »The symbol of the king grew in a special period of history, and it died in most parts of the World in our period. Symbols do not grow because the people are longing for them, and they do not die because of scientific or practical criticism. They die because they can no longer produce response in the group where they originally found expression.« (43) Tillich offers two cases in which we can see the example of dying of the symbol: First: The symbol of the Virgin Mary died in Protestantism »by the changed situation of the relation to God. ... The special, direct, immediate relationship to God makes any mediating power impossible.« (55) This principle introduced into social reality means that a symbol, which is linked to the subconscious and in a certain manner the conscious reality of the social context, excludes the symbol of mediation. Second: »Another reason which has made this symbol disappear is the negation of the ascetic element which is implied in the glorification of virginity.« (55) In some way it is true, that the cult of Virgin Mary introduces into human mentality the value of virginity, and it is also true, that the negation of this principle of catholic faith is the reason that the symbol of the Virgin Mary was not able to

---

humble home, or crucifix on the wall; this or other symbols are nourishing the faith of poor mothers in their houses, while they are taking care of their children (EG 125).

survive in Protestantism. We agree with the historical consequences of the fact introduced by Protestant creed, and in this sense Tillich is right, though we cannot agree with the principles of Protestant creed concerning the Virgin Mary.

#### 4. Tillich's sacramental theology and catholic teaching on sacraments

Our paper is not the place to detail Tillich sacramental theology, but we cannot bypass the fact that it does not coincide with the basic Catholic teaching on sacraments. »For him, all natural reality can be seen to be sacramental, whenever it enters into the correlation which constitutes a miracle.« (Keefe, 195)

Tillich claims: »The sacramental material is not a sign but a symbol. As symbols the sacramental materials are intrinsically related to what they express; they have inherent qualities (water, fire, oil, bread, wine), which makes them adequate to their symbolic function and irreplaceable. The Spirit »uses« the powers of being in nature in order to »enter« man's spirit ... A sacramental symbol is neither a thing nor a sign. It participates in the power of what it is symbolized, and therefore it can be a medium of the Spirit.« (Martinez 2004, 19)<sup>13</sup> In his reflection on the Eucharist he does not use the word »substance«, which is the core of Catholic teaching on the Eucharist (Keefe 1971, 283). For him the material of the sacrament is as such filled with grace – transubstantiation; the divine appears through the finite realities as their transcendent meaning (283).

For our further reflection we need to stop at the Catholic definition of sacrament and see if it permits us to apply the Tillich theory of symbol on the sacramental matters. According to the teaching of Catholic Church, sacraments are outward efficacious signs instituted by Christ to give grace. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says: »The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions.« (CCC 1131)

We see that the term »symbol« is omitted, and the term »sign« is used.<sup>14</sup> But if we consider each of the signs, used in the sacraments: water, vine, bread, oil, we can easily agree, that they have symbolical dimension.<sup>15</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium makes an appeal that the faithful should understand the signs of the liturgy: »It is therefore of the highest importance that the faithful should easily under-

<sup>13</sup> This is protestant doctrine of the sacraments.

<sup>14</sup> The reason for this is to avoid the interpretation of the sacrament, in which the sacrament is acting only as symbol.

<sup>15</sup> The Council of Trent (Sess. XIII, cap. 3) defines the sacrament using the term »symbol«: »Symbolum rei sacrae, et invisibilis gratiae forma visibilis, sanctificandi vim habens« – A symbol of something sacred, a visible form of invisible grace, having the power of sanctifying. (New Advent: Catholic Encyclopedia, s. v. sacraments)

stand the sacramental signs...«, which means also their symbolical dimension, coming from the nature and everyday life.<sup>16</sup>

We can find the answer, why the Church's documents in the definition of sacrament avoid the term »symbol« using »sign« at Tillich himself. He is warning against the danger of idolatry. »The danger of faith is idolatry and the ambiguity of the holy is its demonic possibility.« (Tillich 1987, 21) Every reality in human depths could be possibly misled by symbols, which are not submitted to the discernment, so to say to the divine will. Symbols as centers of power can have the destructive effects when they are misused, as they are in the ideologies, which have their own ritual, because they awake the powers of darkness in social and individual subconscious.<sup>17</sup>

Baptism is the victory of light and good over the original sin, as it was the victory of Jesus over the powers of death and evil and at it was the victory of logos over the chaos in Creation. For Tillich, Cross is the criterion of all other symbols (56) because it makes us recognize the reality Christ's passion, his death and his resurrection; in front of the cross, we are able to accept our own humanity in humility and faith.

## 5. Symbolical dimension of sacraments

**M**atter of the sacrament is exterior, visible part of the sacrament with which or to which something is done in order to confer grace, e.g., water in baptism, chrism in confirmation, bread and wine in the Eucharist. In the order of first nonliteral meaning all sacraments are firstly symbols or at least have the characteristics of symbol, so we may affirm that sacraments have their symbolic part, or that their matter has the qualities of symbol.

1. Pouring of the water is the matter of the sacrament of baptism. It is a symbolic action, which together with the form of the sacrament (pronounced formula) confers grace.
2. Hand on the person and anointing him with chrism (blessed oil) is symbolic action, as such it is the matter of confirmation.
3. Matter of the Eucharist is bread and wine; they have also symbolic meaning. Only in the sacrament of Eucharist the species of bread and wine (signs) bear the real presence of body and blood of Christ. Nothing but the sacraments can effect the reality by the transformation to which the signs point. In the sacraments, the grace of God is effective beyond the symbolic reality of the signs; sacraments are at the same time transcendent reality, not only spiritual.

<sup>16</sup> Osborne seems do not have the problem to name see the term »symbol« as synonym of sacramental sign. (Osborne 1999, 170)

<sup>17</sup> »Tillich reminds us that genuine symbols are centers of power that can either connect us with the source of meaning or can shatter all form within the semiotic and symbolic order that sustain meaning for finite selves.« (Corrington 1997, 26)

4. Matter of confession is verbal confession of sins. Expression of sins is a real action, but it may be considered also as symbolic action, which expressed the attitude of penance; it opens up the inner world of human soul and the same time it makes possible the access to the exterior reality of God's grace. In faith it is more than that; the symbolic action of minister (priest), »opens up« the deepest reality of God's grace and confers it by the means of the formula of forgiveness.
5. Matter of anointing of the sick is anointing with the consecrated oil. It is symbolic action in which the oil that is used has also its symbolic dimension. It is destined to the human body and soul in the situation of suffering. Suffering is the mystery of human existence, which is marked by the presence of death. In this situation, the sacrament on symbolical level, »opens up« human being to the hope and at the same time on the level of faith in Christ confers spiritual and existential strength; a reality of eschatological border is opened up.<sup>18</sup>
6. Matter of holy orders is laying on of hands. It may be conceived as a symbolical action, at the same time this gesture united with the prayer of consecration makes possible God's action in human being. It is a sign in which we can in particular way see the fact of irreplaceability, and uniqueness of the action and this is why it may be considered at the same time as a symbol.

Through the analysis of the sacramental signs, we have come to the following conclusion:

- a. The irreplaceability of symbol: In all sacraments, only one particular matter and action, confers particular grace, the sacrament consists only from this action and not another one. For instance: baptism can be realized only by pouring of the water and prescribed formula, not by some other matter or by some other words.
- b. Participation of the symbol in the reality – in the grace, and engaging of the person in this reality: Every sign of the sacrament participates in the reality it represents, first of all on the symbolic level and then on the level of faith, because it confers grace and engages in grace.
- c. Opening up the reality on the level of symbol: Blessed water, destined for baptism, opens up to the presence of God, creator, and becomes the place of immersion with Christ in his death and resurrection (Rom 6, 4). Bread and wine are consecrated, »opened up« on the sacramental level to become the real presence of Christ, offered to the Father. The sacramental matters (signs) have symbolical characteristics, because on the level of symbol also they open up the reality they represent.

---

<sup>18</sup> Tillich uses the term »boundary situation« to express the brink of human life and finitude of human existence, which can be transcended by the search for God and faith (Tillich 1987, 239–49).

## 6. Community and symbolic language of faith in the liturgy

The origin of Tillich's theory of symbols is connected to the problem of expressing infinite richness of God; symbolic language transcends the possibilities and rules of ordinary language. (Leiner 2009, 45) »Symbols hold the tension between transcendence and concrete reality, a tension that Tillich sees as an essential dimension of faith« (Stenger 2009, 96). Symbols not only point to God, but in the sacrament they become material space of his presence and means of participation for humans in his mystery.

Nevertheless at the same time the function of symbol is horizontal one, which means bring together and foster the community of believers. The function of symbol is to foster communion between the members of the Church. In this sense we have to admit, that pope, as supreme guide of the Church is the symbol of its unity; it comes through especially when he presides the liturgy. »The religious language, the language of symbol and myth, is created in the community of believers and cannot be fully understood outside this community. But within it, the religious language enables the act of faith to have a concrete content.« (Tillich 1987, 27) The structure of symbol depends on all other symbols in which it is inserted.<sup>19</sup> Symbols function in the context of other symbols inserted into the system that they constitute, according to the strategy, that the ritual gives them. As Lukken puts it, in liturgy »many languages come together« in various ways to realize the meaning in the system of signification (Lukken 1994, 279; 283). The liturgy unites different symbolical realities: symbol of space, symbolical (liturgical) time and happening of the liturgy itself, which consists of many elements. Everything has to be united in harmony: The beauty and sacredness of space where the liturgy is celebrated, the respect for the liturgical season, colors of the vestments, singing and performance of the liturgy. In one word, liturgy has to be lived in harmony and balance between all its elements.

## 7. Implications of Tillich's theology of symbols

After we have examined Tillich's theory of symbols, we may see the answers to the problematic of liturgy today, but we have to admit that the most difficult part of our research is the implementation of Tillich's insights in the education of young Christian generations, submitted to so many influences produced by media.

- a. Firstly we claim the fact, that the basic need for symbol and symbolic language still exist, because human beings are marked by symbolics. We can see the foundations everywhere in all cities, important centers, airports, as symbol of life. We

<sup>19</sup> »Symbols usually function in systems« (Wildman 1997, 273), they have their own strategy of functioning, as we can see it also in Tillich's theory of symbols (283–4). Tillich in this regard says: »Symbols which have an especially social function, as political and religious symbols, are created or at least accepted by the collective unconscious of the group in which they appear.« (Tillich 1987, 42)

know how effective are the illuminations of the cities and the lighthouses in the ports; they become the symbol of hope for the navigators in danger of the sea. This is why it is important to be aware, that symbol as such did not lose its importance. »In spite of the loss of dimension of depth, its power is present and most present in those who are aware of the loss and are striving to regain it with ultimate seriousness.« (Tillich 1987, 8)

- b. It would be useful to examine the actual practices and awareness of those who precede the liturgies. We should clarify and elaborate the meaning of symbols by examining the material practices of the Church, which lives out the meaning of its symbols in concrete communities (Thatamanil 2009, 297).
- c. The answer to the question of how to regain the dimension of depth can be found in the »awareness, that we have lost the decisive dimension of life, the dimension of depth...« (Tillich 1987, 7); namely the separation from depth means the separation from the »ultimate source of meaning« (7). Church has the mission to develop and foster spiritual life, which helps to greater awareness, that every human being fundamentally needs the meaning of life, which can be found in God.
- d. There is a great need for mystagogical catechesis on all levels. In perceiving symbol, something is reaching into the depths of our personality and touching the whole person (Lukken 1994, 91). To be able to perceive the depths of the symbol it is necessary a certain naivety or simplicity; by education of young and adult, we may create this condition of openness in human heart. Let us take for example the holly water at the entrance of the church. It is the basic symbol that reminds us of our baptism; it should be put in evidence. There are the churches that put the great structure like fountain at the entrance of the church in the center; it is an important symbol of life springing from the death and resurrection of Christ.
- e. Dying of the religious symbols has its reason in the individualism of modern society, which excluded the religious dimension from the public life. People feed their needs for presence of human being and God, with pleasure and property. Where there is self-sufficiency, there is no need for other, there is no awareness of ones own imperfection and vulnerability; symbol structurally is based on the awareness that plenitude is in the community, recognition of other as basically complementary part of myself. Symbols are supposed to foster communion and community is supposed to participate in embodying of the symbolic language, so as to feed herself.
- f. Tillich brings to our attention the question of »broken symbols«. We have to admit that liturgies performed without care many times produce degenerated symbols, which cease to be a sign of communication and communion. They become void of meaning, and the liturgy is incapable to give possibility of communion with God.
- g. Liturgy has to respect the hierarchy of liturgical elements, so that they can act as a whole. Symbols in themselves have no meaning; this is why they have to expropriate themselves, to be only the pointers to the central reality of the liturgy, which is Christ himself. A revelatory symbol must be one that is completely transparent to the divine, and it must not give the possibility to be mistaken for the infinite power of being, that it makes manifest (Haught 2009, 224). The appeal of this pa-

per is that all who perform the liturgy should take their time in studying this questions and meditate the liturgy itself because only by understanding, we can love what we know and only by loving we can be in service of the liturgy as »servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God« (1 Cor 4,1).

## Abbreviations

- CCC** – *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. 2003 [1993].  
**EG** – Franciscus. 2013. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*.  
**SC** – Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. S. a. [Sacrosanctum Concilium].

## References

- Bertalot, Renzo**. 2013. Paul Tillich: IV; La Vita e lo Spirito. [Http://dimensionesperanza.it/area/ecumene/chiese-cristiane/item/7746-paul-tillich-iv-la-vita-e-lo-spirito-renzo-bertalot.html](http://dimensionesperanza.it/area/ecumene/chiese-cristiane/item/7746-paul-tillich-iv-la-vita-e-lo-spirito-renzo-bertalot.html) (accessed 10. 9. 2013).
- Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy**. S. a. [Sacrosanctum Concilium]. [Http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19631204\\_sacrosanctum-concilium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html) (accessed 10. 9. 2013).
- Corrington, Robert S.** 1997. Regnant Signs: The semiosis of liturgy. *Semiotica* 117, no 1:19–42. [Http://www.users.drew.edu/rcorrington/downloads/regnant\\_signs.pdf](http://www.users.drew.edu/rcorrington/downloads/regnant_signs.pdf) (accessed 10. 9. 2013).
- Dourley, John**. 2009. Tillich in dialogue with psychology. In: Manning 2009, 238–253.
- Folley, William. A.** 1997. *Anthropological Linguistics: An Introduction*. Malden-Oxford-Carlton: Blackwell Publishings.
- Franciscus**. 2013. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*. [Http://www.vatican.va/evangelii-gaudium/en/#216](http://www.vatican.va/evangelii-gaudium/en/#216) (accessed 10. 9. 2013).
- Haight, John F.** 2009. Tillich in dialogue with natural science. In: Manning 2009, 223–237.
- Hughes, Graham**. 2003. *Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Catechism of the Catholic Church**. 2003 [1993]. [Http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM) (accessed 10. 9. 2013).
- Keefe, Donald J.** 1971. *Thomism and the Ontological Theology of Paul Tillich: A Comparison of Systems*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, Leiden.
- Leiner, Martin**. 2009. Tillich on God. In: Manning 2009, 37–55.
- Lukken, Gerard, ed.** 1994. *Per Visibilia ad Invisibilia: Anthropological, Theological and Semiotic studies on the liturgy and the sacraments*. Liturgia Condenda 2. Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House.
- Manning, Russel Re, ed.** 2009. *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Martinez, German**. 2004. *Signs of Freedom: Theology of the Christian Sacrements*. Mahvah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- New Advent: Catholic Encyclopedia**. S. a. Sacraments. [Http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13295a.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13295a.htm) (accessed 10. 9. 2013).
- Osborne, Kenan B.** 1999. *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World*. New York, NJ: Paulist press.
- Reijnen, Anne Marie**. 2009. Tillich's Christology. In: Manning 2009, 56–73.
- Scouarnec, Michael**. 2000. *I simboli cristiani*. Milano: Gribaudo.
- Stenger, Marry Ann**. 2009. Faith (and religion). In: Manning 2009, 91–104.
- Thatamanil, John**. 2009. Tillich and the postmodern. In: Manning 2009, 288–302.
- Tillich, Paul**. 1987 *The Essential Tillich: An Anthology of the Writings of Paul Tillich*. Forrester Church, ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- . 1996. *Teologia Sistematica*. Vol. 1: *Religione e rivelazione; L'essere e Dio*. Torino: Claudiana.
- . 2001. *Teologia Sistematica*. Vol. 2: *L'esistenza e il Cristo*. Torino: Claudiana.
- Wildman, Wesley J.** 1997. Strategic Mechanisms Within Religious Symbol Systems. Duisburg: Linguistic Agency Duisburg. [Http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/images/docs/\(15\)%201999%20-%20Wildman%20-%20Strategic%20Mechanisms%20Within%20Religious%20Symbol%20Systems.pdf](http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/images/docs/(15)%201999%20-%20Wildman%20-%20Strategic%20Mechanisms%20Within%20Religious%20Symbol%20Systems.pdf) (accessed 10. 9. 2013).