

Content Analysis: Symbols

Symbols are everywhere but what do they mean and what message do they carry? A symbol is: (a) an object or its representation, and is used to represent a concept, idea or similar information of the object, (b) a non-verbal representation of an idea, resulting from a process of assimilation and synthesis of that idea in a culture. It conveys a meaning or an idea, visually. Symbols carry a meaning inside beyond the object referring to transcendence. Perceived like this, they can bring (religious) traditions to life and fill them with individual meaning.

Religious symbols represent both religious and secular worldviews and are transmitted from generation to generation through religious teachings or philosophical texts. Anything connected with the religious phenomenon it operates in a predominantly symbolic atmosphere. In religious perspectives, symbols are representatives that strengthen believers' communication with the divine and help them experience spiritual fulfillment. In addition, symbols help believers to express themselves culturally and to construct their identity.

A symbol on its own can become a force that brings people together, or it can be a powerful nonverbal communicator with its meaning. Symbols give life and power to religion; it is mainly through symbols that it is possible for believers to come into contact with the past, present and future of a religion. Symbols, often found in temples or religious gathering places, symbolize the distinctiveness of religion both as an indicator of culture and as an art form. In addition, symbols can sometimes play a role in enabling rituals and ceremonies to take place.

Similarly, symbols are also important in secular worldviews as they provide non-verbal means of communication and represent common values for individuals who share the same ideas. These symbols, which can be associated with individual, cultural or national identities, can also be transformed into art forms that express emotions. Symbols that strengthen the sense of unity and solidarity in worldviews that are secular can also be effective on a universal level in addition to their local effects.

On a textual level, symbols are found in linguistic pictures. Religious texts make use of these by metaphors often shown in mythical narratives. Their special value "consists in expressing reality at once and as a whole, integrally and not differentiated, opening and not defining, representatively? in immediate impressions and not discursively in dissecting form. This is why pictures [and symbols] are particularly suited to expressing elementary questions that touch the depths of our lives. " (Petermann, 2003)

Key Words: Symbols, Religious Symbols, Secular Symbols.

Bibliography

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