

Abstract

The rite of taking the veil and of the temporary vows in female religious congregations present breaking points in the lives of the future nuns. I would argue that these rituals, which sometimes fuse into one ceremony, show clear marks of the so called "rite-of-passage". Nuns put on the veil for the first time, and become full-fledged members of the closed community. The ritual has preserved its main form, even though it has been subjected to some modernisation within many congregations. We can observe its importance hasn't been much diminished since late. This study attempts to demonstrate the importance of these ceremonies in contemporary communities and to show that they can truly be categorised as examples of rite-of-passage ("rite-de-passage") such as has been coined and described by Arnold van Gennep. Studying the importance of the ritual means exploring also its role in the individual life stories recalled by the selected respondents. This thesis is based on both the method of participant observation and the biographical study. It uses the scheme of social drama introduced by Victor Witter Turner to demonstrate the role of a ritual within a community, even as its impact on the individual lives. In the study we can follow the process of entering the community through the eyes of the nuns themselves, and so define whether the congregation really behaves as a "communitas" or not. The religious congregations observed are the following: Discalced Carmelites in Prague and Sisters of Mercy from Saint Borromeo in Prague. The former presents example of a contemplative order, the latter of an active one; and so the study also brings forth a comparison of the ritual attitude between these two.

Keywords: rite of passage, taking the veil, temporary vows, female religious order, closed community, function of the ritual