

Summary

The Crucified. Contemporary Passion plays in Poland is an anthropological study of a phenomenon observed within the range of contemporary Catholic religiosity. Significant changes have occurred in that field since 1989, as religion began to enter the public sphere and the media, and to embrace an increasing number of church events, often mass ones, which were not encountered earlier. Concurrently, religious events change their form; they go beyond liturgy and additionally become an attractive way of spending leisure time. This situation is tackled by the author of the book, who demonstrates that the old concepts of interpretation are no longer valid with reference to new developments and that the anthropology of religion today needs new tools to analyse the new reality. For this reason *The Crucified* focuses on two fundamental issues: the title Easter performances and performance theory. Similarly, two objectives are highlighted in the volume. The first is to demonstrate the capacity of that theory in the interpretation of religious phenomena, particularly Catholic ones, the second – to present an increasingly widespread phenomenon which has not yet been described in the form of a monograph. Drawing her inspiration from the achievements of scholars who are the classic representatives of the performance theory, such as Edward Schieffelin, Victor Turner, Susan Rostas, Gary Palmer and William Jankowiak, the author reinterprets and develops it so as to turn it into a useful tool for an anthropologist of religion.

The Crucified is an analysis of material collected during five years of field research, which sheds light on the varied world of religious performances. The mysteries of the Passion of Christ that the book describes are Catholic re-enactments of the last moments of Christ's life, which are organised, in collaboration with ecclesiastical authorities, in the Easter period. As a phenomenon, however, they are not homogeneous. Some of these Easter performances are modest productions staged with the use of almost home-made means; others are spectacular, professional projects aimed at presenting something of a religious show. Some are attended by about a hundred people; others draw in tens of thousands. The scripts of the Passion plays differ as well; some rely solely on the events of the Passion, others include apocryphal stories. There are also scripts that include stories invented specifically for the play, which show and complement the presentation of the

Passion of Christ in a new and innovative way. Other differences include the location: these performances are staged in very different places, including the interiors of churches, paths of the local Way of the Cross, places of execution, city squares, recreational parks and racecourses. In effect, the phenomenon of Passion plays is extremely complex and to some extent heterogeneous; hence its in-depth analysis reveals much not only about its own nature, but also about the entire modern religiosity.

As a result of this, the book is constructed so as to focus on a single phenomenon, but with conclusions extending to a much wider range of religious phenomena, since the presented phenomena constitute a kind of a *signum temporis*. The author discusses the condition of contemporary Catholic religion and its relationship with popular culture, as well as with local communities and the old “folk” culture. The book reveals the need for self-expression of one’s own attitudes observable in contemporary spirituality, as well as the increasing participation of believers in the development of their religious life and thus in the formation of their own religious identity. Another important issue debated by the author is the matter of experiencing religious phenomena by the performers, as well as by the audience. Balancing between the common and individual experience, the book presents the ways in which Passion plays are experienced, which often result in changes in the believers’ religious attitudes or, more broadly, their attitudes to life. The book combines all these themes by interpreting Passion plays by means of performance theory; a theory familiar to anthropology of religion, but not previously used to interpret Catholic phenomena. Thanks to that theory, the author captures the transformation in religiosity which is associated with the believers’ need for activity and creativity in the field of practices alternative to the liturgy.

The Crucified demonstrates that the organisers of Passion plays perfectly meet the needs of today’s believers. Emotional experiences caused by participation in the Easter play exceed not only experiences associated with the liturgy, but also those associated with other major religious events. Using the power of visualisation and, quite often, modern techniques or even the means of expression native to mass events, Passion plays show a story which is central to Christianity, fulfilling the expectations of recipients accustomed to poetics offered by popular culture. Placed at the intersection of the popular and the high, the religious and the secular, the sublime and the ludic, they form a phenomenon unique in Polish religiosity, which to a certain extent alters the routine of the liturgical calendar.