



The first female communion between two sides of the ocean (Brazil and Spain): archived images of education and religion¹

A primeira comunhão feminina entre dois lados do oceano (Brasil e Espanha): imagens arquivadas de educação e religião

La primera comunión femenina entre dos lados del océano (Brasil y España): imágenes arquivadas de educación y religión

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Abstract

The study refers to archives containing female photographic images about the moment of the first Communion, a ritual to which girls were subjected by their families, as one of the five main sacraments of the Catholic Church. The main objective is to analyze the portraits produced strictly for this purpose, the day of first Communion, with a focus on aspects such as posture, clothing, stage objects, furniture, religious symbols present, etc. More specifically, we seek to compare images produced in Brazil and Spain, during the first communion of girls, in the first half of the 20th century, examining the peculiarities of each country. The methodological procedures refer to a qualitative and historical-documentary research, which uses the comparative method of investigation. Among the results obtained is the close relationship between first Communion with school practices, characterized as a ritualized moment in the context of the school schedule itself.

Keywords: First Communion. Religious rituals. Brazil and Spain.

¹ English version by Takefive Idiomas e Traduções. E-mail: info@takefive.com.br.

Resumo

O estudo refere-se a arquivos que contém imagens fotográficas femininas sobre o momento de realização da primeira comunhão, ritual ao qual às meninas estavam submetidas por suas famílias, como um dos cinco sacramentos principais da Igreja Católica. O objetivo central está em analisar os retratos produzidos expressamente para esse fim, o dia da primeira comunhão, com foco em aspectos como a postura, a indumentária, os objetos de cena, o mobiliário, a simbologia religiosa presente etc. De forma mais específica busca-se comparar imagens produzidas no Brasil e na Espanha, durante a primeira comunhão de meninas, na primeira metade do século XX, examinando-se as peculiaridades próprias de cada país. Os procedimentos metodológicos remetem a uma pesquisa qualitativa e histórico-documental, que utiliza o método comparado de investigação. Entre os resultados obtidos consta-se a relação estreita entre a primeira comunhão com as práticas escolares, caracterizando-se como um momento ritualizado no contexto do próprio cronograma escolar.

Palavras-chave: Primeira comunhão. Rituais religiosos. Brasil e Espanha.

Resumen

El estudio se refiere a archivos que contienen imágenes fotográficas femeninas sobre el momento de la primera comunión, ritual al que las niñas fueron sometidas por sus familias, mediante uno de los cinco sacramentos principales de la Iglesia Católica. El objetivo principal es analizar los retratos realizados expresamente a tal efecto, el día de la primera comunión, a través de un enfoque centrado en analizar aspectos como la postura, la vestimenta, los objetos escénicos, el mobiliario, los símbolos religiosos presentes, etc. Más concretamente, buscamos comparar imágenes producidas en Brasil y España, durante la primera comunión de niñas, en la primera mitad del siglo XX, examinando las peculiaridades de cada país. Los procedimientos metodológicos se vinculan a una investigación cualitativa e histórico-documental, que utiliza el método de investigación comparativo. Entre los resultados obtenidos se encuentra la estrecha relación entre la primera comunión con las prácticas escolares, caracterizada como un momento ritualizado en el contexto del propio horario escolar.

Palabras clave: Primera comunión. Rituales religiosos. Brasil y España.

Introduction

One of the photographs which is always present as a part of those forming the collection of childhood memories, for those who were living through this period in the mid twentieth century, is the one taken during the ritual of the first Communion. A moment awaited by families, required by the Catholic Church, encouraged by school and rehearsed by the children who rehearsed and were prepared for the “big day”, first Communion incorporated into the ecclesiastical sacrament, an elaborate rite of passage², which for girls, carried ornaments relating to the symbolism intended for the occasion.

The Catholic Church, by way of its Codes and ecclesiastical Constitution bears the same rituals and ceremonies spread by Christendom, based on papal resolutions, making sure that its sacraments take place in exactly the same manner in the vast majority of the western Catholic world under the aegis of the Vatican, with very little variations, related to the cultural traits and allowances for syncretism that have been incorporated over the centuries. Thus, the Catholic Church converts, since time immemorial, into the formative entity of a common Christian model for ritual ceremonies, whose identification is possible in any country in the world, for it is based on a single doctrine, adaptable to different societies and applicable in any language.

Among the rites which are widely practiced and converted into public festivities in almost every Catholic country is first Communion, established for children who are already literate, have achieved a level of abstraction in order to understand the subjectivities present in catechism and also to proceed to the confession of their “sins” which precedes the initiation into the Eucharist. According to Scholl and Grimaldi (2013, p.352), quoting Pope Pius X, “children should take Communion as soon as they could grasp the slightest concept of what they were about to receive, even if the remainder of their character-building were to follow later”.

As a model adopted very similarly in most countries, this rite involves families, parishes, churches and schools, observing the responsibilities laid down in the rules of the Church itself. On one hand, the sacred rite is the same, based on doctrine, laid out in detail in the catechisms, rehearsed in the stages of preparation, profession of faith, confession and communion, with all the symbolism and the necessary emblems to bring Heaven and Earth together in this pact which will take place between the “new” faithful and the Church. On the other hand, the also similar, profane celebration involves the preparation for the public ceremony, especially for girls, as miniatures of saints, angels, brides of Christ, requiring equally careful elaboration by the families, almost always with the ultimate objective of being perpetuated in an edifying photograph, capable of capturing not only an image, but the sensations experienced and the perpetuity of the moment.

The study at hand refers to the first Communion as an object of investigation, based on the analysis of archives containing female photographic images about this moment of ritual, to which girls have been submitted by their families, as one of the five main sacraments of the Catholic Church all over the world. The main objective lies in analyzing the images produced strictly for this purpose, the day of first Communion, focusing on aspects such as posture, dress code, stage objects, furnishings, the religious symbolism present etc. Ritual images are highlighted more specifically, as in the case of the holy cards (“santinhos” or “mini-saints”)³, produced in Brazil and in Spain during first

² The concept of rite of passage used in this study takes us back to Arnold Van Gennep (1873 -1957), in his work entitled “The rites of passage”, understood to be an intermediary, initial, marginal or borderline period which one goes through in order to fit in with the collective plan. Among the rites of passage, Gennep identifies the ones whose objective is to join the sacred world, which can only be done by putting into action procedures that pertain to religion.

³ Grazziotin and Bastos (2017, p.576) identify the “santinhos” as cards printed with “a small image representing the human figure of Christ, the Virgin Mary or of a saint”.

Communion for girls, in the first half of the twentieth century, examining the specific traits to this symbolism in each country.

With regard to methodological procedures, this study is a qualitative as well as historical and documentary survey, based initially on a theoretical study about first Communion as a religious ritual, to then analyze the materiality of the photographic images obtained of this ceremony, and using, in conclusion, the compared method of investigation. Recognizing the use of images as educational historical documents (DEL POZO, RABAZAS, 2010; 2012), in addition to the sources accessed in the study, personal archives were also researched (CUNHA, 2019), as well as public and private collections holding photographic images of first Communion ceremonies, with an emphasis on archives with images of Notre Dame de Sion School in Petrópolis, a Catholic school for girls, where this was deemed to be one of the most important solemnities of the school year and in the collection belonging to the Seville University Educational Sciences School Museum (Museo Pedagógico da Faculdade de Ciências da Educação da Universidade de Sevilha -MPFCCEUS) (ÁLVAREZ; REBOLLO; NÚÑEZ, 2016), which holds a photographic collection relating to these ceremonies in different locations in Spain, especially in Andalusia.

To address a theme whose first records are associated to the very popularization of photographic mechanisms, it became necessary to determine a period of analysis in order to break down the materiality aspects which can be gleaned from the images studied. In that respect, we opted for the first half of the 20th century, considering that the inter-war period saw an advancement and dissemination of Catholicism throughout the world as well as the consolidation of the 1917 Code of Canon Law⁴.

First Communion as a religious rite: the duty of families, parish priests and teachers

The 20th century is marked by being in the middle of the two Catholic Church Ecumenical Councils of the modern age, the First Vatican Council, held between 1869 and 1870 and the Second Vatican Council, from 1962 to 1965, both, in their own time, seeking to provide answers to contemporary questions, from reconciling the “opposition between faith and reason” to attempting to “expand the horizons of self - consciousness of the Catholic Church under various aspects” (RIBEIRO, 2006, p.72). In the “Catholic Declaration of Faith”, from the First Vatican Council, the profession of Faith observed that there existed seven sacraments of the “New Law”, “instituted by Our Lord Jesus Christ and necessary for salvation, though each person need not receive them all”. They are: baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, last anointment, order and matrimony (FIRST VATICAN COUNCIL, 1870, s/p.). With regard to the Eucharist, it was essential to be prepared to receive it, for it was considered that

in the most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist there is truly, really and substantially the Body and the Blood, together with the Soul and Divinity, of Our Lord Jesus Christ; and that there takes place the conversion of the whole substance of the bread into His Body, and of the whole substance of the wine into His Blood; and this conversion the Catholic Church calls “transubstantiation” (FIRST VATICAN COUNCIL, 1870, s/p.)

In the last supper that Jesus Christ celebrated with the Twelve Apostles we find the basis for the first communion as a Christian ritual and as a ceremonial and sacramental

⁴ The Code of Canon Law, “*Codex iuriscanonicus*”, was enacted by Benedict XV in 1917. The Code came into effect on May 19th, 1918, and is known as the Pio-Benedictine Code, named after the two Popes who created it.

act, its origin being in the 13th century, specifically in 1215, when the Lateran Council decided that only minors who had reached the age of discretion (between twelve and fourteen years) could receive this sacrament (RICO, 2006). Thus, the Eucharist became one of the most important sacraments of the Catholic Church, since it was after Baptism that fully conscious Christians, during childhood, embraced religion “out of free will”. According to Pereira (2012), first Communion is the act of receiving the Eucharist for the first time, which differs from Communion for adults, now initiated on the Christian path, which takes place at all masses, when they receive the Eucharist. To this author, Communion is the essence of Church life and is interwoven in “a set of symbolic elements which form not only a ceremony filled with signs and representations, but also something which is at the core of Catholic religion” (PEREIRA, 2012, p.34). The author addresses this sacrament as the “link” which permeates all other sacraments, configuring a social pact with the sacred, whose initiation takes place through the first Communion, which is viewed as a rite of passage and initiation into adhesion to the religious community.

To Pereira (2012, p.35-36), Communion is all about an “inclusive social pact” and its initiation; first Communion is part of what are known as the “sacraments of Christian initiation”, which have existed since the first five centuries of Christianity, when it was held before and/or at the same time as baptism, considering that the latter was performed on adults. The practice of obliging children to participate in confession and receive Communion takes place around the 13th century, when the age of reason was considered to be between 7 and 8 years. Between the First and Second Vatican Councils these ages varied according to ecclesiastic recommendations, with the observation that children be literate when receiving their first Communion.

The 1917 Code Of Canon Law (Código de Direito Canônico- CDC), in effect during the period on which this study is concentrated, prescribed in its canon 853 that “any baptized person not prohibited by law can and must be admitted to communion”, but the Eucharist can only be given to children with the knowledge and taste for this sacrament, in other words, of sufficient age to “distinguish the body of Christ from habitual food, and worship it with reverence”, except when in danger of death. (CDC, 1917, can. 854). Another condition prescribed in the 1917 CDC was “a more complete knowledge of the Christian doctrine and more careful preparation, namely, befitting their age” (Ibidem). Even so, it would be up to the confessor “to judge on the sufficiency of arrangements for these children for the first Communion”, as well as to the parents or anyone taking the place of the parents (Ibidem). In other words, the parish priest was responsible for ensuring that the children reach the “sacred banquet” in full use of reason and with enough catechetical provisions.

In addition to the parish priest, canon 860 attributed responsibility for the first Communion to all those within the child’s closest circle, making of this sacrament a collective obligation which involved family, church and school: “The obligation of the precept of Communion, which is incumbent upon the impubescent, falls mainly upon their guardians, namely parents, tutors, confessor, teachers and parish priest”. Further on, canons 1329 and 1330 reinforced the catechetical duty of parish priests as “a special and very serious duty”, to prepare the children to receive with dignity the sacraments of penance and first Communion (CDC, 1917).

The norms of the 1917 CDC endured for a large part of the 20th century, considering that the next Code of Canon Law to succeed it would only be enacted by Pope John Paul II, in 1983, as the “*Sacrae Disciplinae Leges*” Apostolic Constitution (CDC, 1983). However, with regard to the first Communion, it continued to be an important sacramental pact, among the most essential pacts to govern religious life: “the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and the Most Holy Eucharist are interrelated in such a way that they are required for full Christian initiation” (CDC, 1983, can. 842). For this purpose, it should be preceded by

“comprehensive and in-depth” catechetical studies, to be administered at a “convenient time”, duly preparing the children for their first reception of the Eucharist (CDC, 1983, can.777). Additionally, it was once more reiterated:

The Administration of the Most Holy Eucharist to children requires that they have sufficient knowledge and careful preparation so that they understand the mystery of Christ according to their capacity and are able to receive the body of Christ with faith and devotion (CDC, 1983, can. 913).

Once again, in the 1983 CDC, responsibility was ascribed to parents to find the parish, observe preparations, make arrangements and carry out, as soon as possible, the sacrament of the first Communion:

It is primarily the duty of parents and those who take the place of parents, as well as the duty of pastors, to take care that children who have reached the use of reason are prepared properly and, after they have made sacramental confession, are refreshed with this divine food as soon as possible; it is also for the pastor to exercise vigilance so that children who have not attained the use of reason or whom he judges are not sufficiently disposed do not approach Holy Communion (CDC, 1983, can. 914).

Within this context of imposition by the Church, it resulted that families, parish churches and schools transformed the obligation into a public ritual, ranging from the most simple to the most elaborate event, depending on the circumstances of the group of participants, reflecting onto the religious practices the easily noticeable social differences in ecclesiastic ceremonies with the same purpose. Pereira (2012, p.36) indicates that on reaching the family, first Communion becomes a party to display social visibility to the community, increasing “all elements of solemn celebration”, among them clothes, ornaments, flowers. Its magnitude is now also dramatized in a scene with angels, tapers, processions, decorations, incenses, memories in print, chants, and above all, immortalizing the moment through photographs that were able to capture not only the set design, but also the characters with the posture that displayed full ability for the occasion.

In the procession prepared for the staging of the ritual, there is great importance with regard to the hierarchy that can be observed at a distance between the sacred and the mundane, between the directors and the directed. Additionally, if on one hand the social dimension of the festivities can reduce the ceremony’s theological connotation, on the other hand, this very dimension attracts “bonds between Church and the faithful, and in view of this, becomes very convenient for both parties” (PEREIRA, 2012, p.38). Pereira (2012) observes, furthermore, quoting Durkheim, that it is natural that children, before the elements of power, force and mystery present at first Communion ceremonies feel fearful, dependent and even enthusiastic.

On the day of celebration of this holy ceremony, what children see around them, on all sides, what is offered to their senses, what draws their attention are the multiple images of the Eucharist, unfolding in symbols such as the clothing, white or in other colors, but made specially for this event, the candles, flowers, sacred images, in summary, so many symbols which are extensions of the sacred, as the liturgical ritual itself and the certificate on which the pact with God and

the Church is signed. [...]The first Communion, presented this way, in such a ritualistic way, at the center of children's lives, becomes profoundly representative, setting upon them its symbolic meanings, because according to guidelines received during catechism, the consecrated host is the only concrete object of divine presence that they can visualize (PEREIRA, 2012, p.48).

Within this perspective, the images experienced during first Communion understood as the main sacrament which marks the Christian mystery (MIRALLES; 2000), are perpetuated in the photographs taken with this purpose, enabling the ritual to "survive" in the memory, through the symbols related to it. The photograph of the first Communion would be a certificate of sorts, to substantiate the rite of passage, which according to Gennep (2011), would move out of the former, profane, world to enter the sacred zone, a new world reached through that rite of entry immortalized in that moment by the image.

Dressed as angels or as small Immaculatas: images from a girl's first Communion

Pierre and Marie-Claire Bourdieu (2006), in the article "The peasant and photography", drawing from ethnographic records of the village in Southwestern France where the author spent his childhood, analyze the social uses and the meaning of photographs and photographic practice in peasant society in Béarn, in the early 1960s, not in themselves and for themselves, "but as lay sociograms that enable a visual recording of the existing social roles and relations" (p.31). The authors show that the photos were inserted into the ritual of the village ceremonies in the early 20th century, according to the social importance of each one of them: first the ones with weddings, and around 1930, photos of first Communion events. Thus, photographs should be the object of sociological interpretation and enable a sufficiently credible representation, but "never" because of their "technical and aesthetic features" (2005, p.34). Pierre and Marie-Claire Bourdieu (2006) believed that "taking pictures of major ceremonies is possible because – and only because – these images capture behavior that is socially accepted and socially regulated, in other words, already performed. Nothing beyond what should be photographed can be photographed" (p.34). Photographs were not an individual representation, but the identification of a social role.

First Communion was, therefore, one of the first themes to come into effect in the "photographic portrait universe", in the words of Scholl and Grimaldi (2013, p.353). Additionally, this rite, which was typical of pre-adolescence, becomes more and more connected with childhood, as demonstrated by the photographs (Ditto).

Within this context of attributing the performance of the first Communion ceremony between childhood and adolescence, in the first decades of the 20th century the education of young girls is described by Philippe Lejeune (1997, p.107-108), based on his diary entries, in two phases: up to the age of 14 or 15 years the first phase occurred, "which revolved around a central and mandatory event, the first Communion, awaited, prepared for, then remembered and celebrated. It was a safe period for girls. Everything was organized, and they had hardly any choices to make". Then came the second phase, geared towards wedding preparations. Thus, the pictures of the first Communion would mark the social climax expected of the first phase in the life of Catholic women, perpetuating the image depicting the proper and accepted behavior for each one of them, on fulfilling their rite of passage.

According to Mansk (2009, p.245) rites of passage are characterized by common symbolic elements whose objective is to value and demarcate the initiation. In the case of the first Communion treated as an "initiation rite", these symbols are present in the use "of water, use of the anointment and laying on of hands, of the robe", among other elements that aimed at

consolidating and maintaining the ritualistic practice. Thus, it was important that they be exposed in the scene and on the posture photographed, in order to corroborate observation of the necessary prescriptions for the initiation.

Beleli (2012, p.16), on reliving her first Communion in the 1960s highlights the “central role given to the girls in the preparation for the event – the excitement in choosing the models of dresses and their accessories –, which did not go unnoticed by the somewhat ‘envious’ look cast by some of the boys”, acting in mere supporting roles. Thus, photographs testify to something which could already be noticed: first Communion was primarily a female ceremony, and boys played a secondary role even when it came to images. The ritual worked as a wedding preparation, where the bride is the protagonist, the one whose photos can be individual, and for whom preparation involves a mixture of tradition, sensitivities, affection and memories. As the author points out:

A high point of the preparations was the permission to wear garlands or wreaths, in some cases the same ones worn by mothers and grandmothers on their wedding day. In the search for this special ornament, ransacked chests and hacked memories conjured up recollections of occasions perceived as unique moments. First Communion and wedding ceremonies were joined in different instances of space and time, as if the first event were already preparation for the second, “appropriate”, fate for the majority of women (BELELI, 2012, p.17).

Regarding the gender aspect, Scholl and Grimaldi (2013, p.368), corroborate, in the 1960s, the continued practice of separating the groups of boys from the girls for first Communion, even in coed schools; the authors highlight the “precedence of the female group over the male group, when it comes to Communion”.

Despite first Communion being the highlight of Catholic school ceremonies, especially those destined for girls, mainly during the first half of the 20th century, when those institutions were greatly sought after, Jacques (2016) states that the same happened in evangelical schools, though they strived to maintain a secular stance. In her study on the Farroupilha School (Colégio Farroupilha) in Porto Alegre, a private school founded by Germans, the author concludes, based on interviews given, that “despite being a secular school, religious services for Catholics and Protestants guided the institution’s educational practices” (JACQUES, 2016, p.7). First Communion ceremonies held at Colégio Farroupilha had the same traits observed at Catholic schools, with similar symbolism to that stated by the researcher’s interviewees, where church pews were decorated with white ribbons and school banners, students would enter in line, one behind the other, holding a white candle which was lit and placed near the central nave pews. The girls wore white, as did the teachers, and would enter holding a lily, also white (JACQUES, 2016).

The images perpetuated through photographs also possess the ability to bring together generations of women, as the rite of passage is imposed on all followers of the Roman Catholic religion. Thus, when revisited by their protagonists in adulthood, they can be looked back on in the way Osman Lins describes in his book “Marinheiro de primeira viagem” (“First Time Traveller”), analyzed by Nakagome (2014). The author wrote:

Holy day garden morning sun sitting down pew presence father
mother two grandparents committed photographing two girls first
communion liturgical costumes one serious the other smiling.
Imagine how will see girls pictures in forty years. Will compare
photographs first communion granddaughters thinking look like

them not believing passing time remembering fondly parents grandparents silent dead brightness of this festive morning (LINS, 1980, p.65, *apud* NAKAGOME, 2014, p.443).

The idea of the similarity between the photos of the grandmothers and the granddaughters is explained by Reznick and Gonçalves (2003, p.79) when they point out that first Communion is involved by a concept of a “cyclical, repetitive festivity”, where the same elements are reproduced and are displayed in the images albeit separated by decades, their “temporality is variable”. Thus, first Communion cannot be dated by the scenic elements of its photographs alone, because they are similar, and everyone experiences these events repeatedly, in dissenting times, in completely different contexts, in distinct countries, as in the case of Brazil and Spain. According to the authors, first Communion “enables an ambiguous perception in relation to time” (REZNICK and GONÇALVES, 2003, p.79).

Furthermore, Magueta (2015), in an in-depth study on the practice of photography during first Communion, points out that the settings follow a constant model of the catechism manuals used in a timeless manner, with the same objects recommended to form the picture: the prayer stool, the altar, crucifix, candle holder with candles, the beads, the missal, flower vases, sacred images or scenery panels with scenes which could be chosen out of one or two, the most common being one of Christ surrounded by enlightenment. The “scenery-panels”, were sometimes part of the studio belonging to the photographer hired, or even of a small studio set up on the actual site of the ceremony to register the images of the occasion. On a smaller scale, it is possible that some photos were taken at the actual homes of the children, before or after the ceremony, according to availability for exclusive hire by the family.

According to the author (MAGUETA, 2015, p.67), “the studio cameras in the 1940s were still attached to the tripod”. In the face of this limitation, children were made to hold still, for a certain length of time, obeying orders from the photographer, who would manage his camera on the tripod, so that the girls dressed as immaculate saints could perpetuate the long-awaited day of Communion. Posture also followed the pattern of “neocommunicants”, which should highlight devoutness, in the kneeling position or standing with hands joined in prayer, holding the rosary and the missal. To Magueta (2015, p.175), those receiving catechism were instructed, according to the manuals from the 1940s, to worship the body of Christ, therefore, the most commonly seen position is kneeling, representing a “fantasy depiction” of the event, which counted on the “support of all those involved, at different level – the photographers, the family, the photographed”.

Most of the individual photographs of the day of first Communion are of full body pictures, especially because they were of girls, whose clothing and accessories had been made in order to be shown, photographed and stored. Thus, from the wreath, the medal on the chain, to the shoes, the angle of the photographic record sought to preserve as much as possible of the visual possibilities of this attire. Once they were developed, the photos went on to comprise the family albums, most of them in green cardboard, covered by a sheet of silk so as not to stain the photographs, bound by small angle brackets on each page, or simply glued in. On the album covers, scenery or figures of children, padded, painted or applied through marquetery or on metal, with finishing touches of strings ending in a fringe pendant, which could serve as a bookmark, which made for true works of art in some cases. The albums framed the photographs, intended to be as perennial as their casing.

The images we chose to present in this study, with regard to first Communion in a Brazilian context in the first half of the 20th century, relate to the ceremony held at Colégio Notre Dame de Sion in Petrópolis. The personal photo library in which the Photographs were found belonged to a former student called Ruth, or “Querida Ruth” (Dear Ruth), “Rutinha” (Little Ruth), as they are presented in her personal belongings where everything directed at

her is stored (VASCONCELOS, 2018). With regard to her signature on the material analyzed, it carries only the name Ruth, and sometimes both surnames that identify her. Unfortunately, her album containing the images –which one can assume existed by the angle brackets used which had been stored in an envelope –, no longer exists, and the personal files were kept, by whoever removed it from its original spot, in a cardboard box, which we denominated “box of memories”, having already suffered considerable wear and tear over time (VASCONCELOS, 2018). According to Cunha (2019, p.99), the personal files, hidden in chests or boxes, are representations of the time in which they were produced, wrapped according to the existing order.

Ruth was most probably born in the years nearing the dawn of 1920, in the town of Petrópolis, no longer Imperial, but now part of the State of Rio de Janeiro. By the letters and cards it is possible to establish that she had one brother and two sisters. Her brother studied in Rio de Janeiro and her sisters at the same School, Colégio Notre Dame de Sion in Petrópolis (VASCONCELOS, 2018). As was the case with girls that were part of the elite in her town, Ruth studied at the best school and participated in the highly valued religious activities in Petrópolis society of the day, among them, first Communion.

Ruth received her first Communion in 1928⁵, her sister Cyrene in 1930, and her brother Selmo in 1934, which can be ascertained by the holy cards (santinhos) exchanged among them in those years; there were countless first Communion cards distributed among the girls who took part in the ritual. The photograph of Ruth’s first Communion, stored in her box of memories, was taken on Sunday, June 3rd, 1928, and refers to the whole group of neocommunicants, after the mass where they received the first Eucharist, in the inner cloister of Colégio Notre Dame de Sion.

According to Scholl and Grimaldi (2013, p.361), in a comprehensive survey on the subject, the ritual started in the morning with the priest welcoming the children at the church door to bless them and sprinkle them with holy water. Next, he would go up to each one of them to receive the vows of the profession of faith, and mass would then begin, during which, the hour of Communion was dedicated primarily to them, on their knees, in line, in the order previously rehearsed for the occasion. In the afternoon, or at the end of mass, Scholl and Grimaldi (Ibidem), ascertained that the “child communicants would appear before the altar for the consecration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Blessed Virgin”, to then partake in the solemn blessing with the Blessed Sacrament.

This ceremony whose photographic record is a part of Ruth’s box of memories, was held in the inner patio of Colégio Notre Dame de Sion, as seen in Image 1 below. It is a photo taken from the second storey of the building, seeking to take in the whole atrium, where worship of the Blessed Sacrament is already being celebrated, probably after the communicant girls had exited mass from the School Chapel⁶, located between the two cloisters, separating the Renaissance style buildings.

⁵ It was only possible to distinguish the years when Ruth’s (1928) and Cyrene’s (1930) Communion ceremonies took place after a thorough examination of the collection in comparison to other documents from Colégio Notre Dame de Sion. Therefore, until then, Ruth’s Communion was registered together with her sister Cyrene’s, a fact corrected in this article. To find out more about the subject see Vasconcelos (2018).

⁶ The Chapel of Colégio Notre Dame de Sion began to be erected in 1914 by engineer Heitor da Silva Costa, who built other important religious monumental pieces, among them, the monument to Christ the Redeemer, at the top of Corcovado Mountain, in Rio de Janeiro (ALAMINO, 2008). The premises of Colégio Notre Dame de Sion in Petrópolis were sold to the Catholic University of Petrópolis (Universidade Católica de Petrópolis - UCP), in 1969, which still function at this site to this day, as does the Our Lady of Sion Chapel (Capela Nossa Senhora do Sion), at the University, which holds different religious cults.

Imagem1 – Worship ceremony to the Blessed Sacrament following first communion at Colégio Notre Dame de Sion, Petrópolis (Brazil).

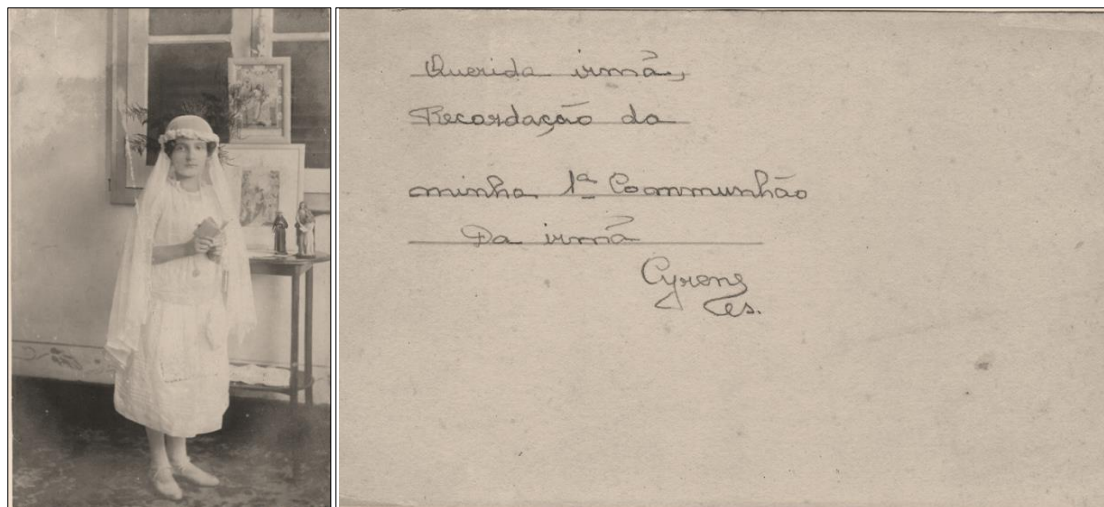


Source: Author's personal files. Date: 03/06/1928.

The photograph shows the open air ceremony, in the cloister, in front of the statue of Our Lady of Sion, where an altar was erected to place the monstrance. Facing the altar stands the main celebrant, a priest wearing an Asperges cape and Humeral veil with embroidered cross, flanked by two deacons. Behind and to the right of the altar are the acolytes, on their knees. They are surrounded by the girls, also kneeling, who received the first Communion, separated according to height, which may indicate organization by school class, with the shortest in front, followed by the taller girls standing, in a row in pairs behind the celebrants. It is also possible to see pupils belonging to some religious student congregation, students dressed in uniform, and novices holding the standards with the images of the Blessed Virgin. Family members, as well as the nuns from the congregation and the remaining students forming the support, occupy the side galleries on the first floor and certainly on the upper level as well. We notice that the group of girls who received first Communion is in white, their dresses below the knees, and they all wear a white organza veil almost up to the height of the dress. The girls who are kneeling around the celebrants carry a basket, possibly containing flowers, petals, or maybe their missal sand rosaries, as well as mementoes or holy cards, to be bestowed later. It is worth noting that the perfect order with which the students are distributed in the school yard also reveals the level of detail and the importance given to this ceremony, which was rehearsed beforehand, so that its image, almost a hundred years later, could still inspire enchantment due to its harmony and perfection.

Ruth's sister Cyrene, also a student at Colégio Notre Dame de Sion, would receive her first Communion two years after Ruth, on October 14th, 1930, according to her holy card souvenir given to her sister, together with her photograph of that day, as seen in Image 2 below.

Image 2 – Photograph of Cyrene’s first Communion at Colégio Notre Dame de Sion, Petrópolis (Brazil).



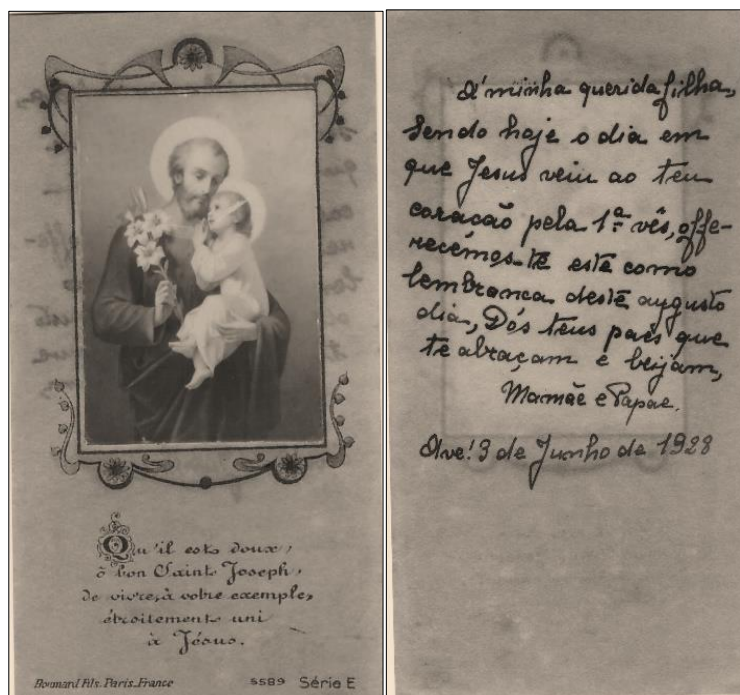
Source: Author’s personal files. Date: 14/10/1930.

It is likely that Cyrene experienced a ritual similar to that of her sister Ruth, recorded in the previous photograph, with the same ceremony taking place in the School cloister, after the Eucharist mass. Her attire is similar to the one worn by the girls in the group shown next to the statue of Our Lady of Sion in Image 1, in a soft cotton dress embroidered in white, reaching below the knees accompanied by a veil almost up to the height of the dress. The veil is also embroidered at the tips and topped off at the head with a wreath of flowers. She carries a small purse made of the same fabric, to keep the open missal and the rosary she has in her hands, the pose in the photo is that of someone reading her prayers. Around her neck she has a chain reaching down to her waist with a medal, possibly of a saint. The shoes are made of fabric, Mary-janes style, also light colored.

The photograph was taken next to a window, probably at Cyrene’s house, for the scene is improvised, with the Catholic symbols being those usually seen in a domestic environment. Acting sometimes as an altar, a wooden sideboard behind the girl holds two images in wood, the first of Saint Anne teaching Mary and the second of Saint Francis of Assisi. At the back topping the sideboard as a makeshift backdrop, we see two framed pictures, with biblical scenes with Jesus Christ passing on teachings to children and adults.

For the day of her first Communion, as was the custom for all girls, Ruth had holy cards made to offer to family members and friends as gifts or mementoes for the occasion. However, she gave away all of them and kept none for herself, or maybe lost her own cards, leaving in her box of memories only a variety of holy cards received from other colleagues, on this same day. Thus, her parents, her grandmother Maria and her sister Cyrene, confirm in the dedications on the holy cards they offered to Ruth as a memento, the date and the records of her first Communion, at Colégio Notre Dame de Sion, seen in Images 3, 4 and 5.

Image 3 – Holy card received as a souvenir from her parents for Ruth’s first Communion, Petrópolis (Brazil)⁷.



Source: Author’s personal files. Date: 03/06/1928.

Image 4 – Holy card received by Ruth as a souvenir from her grandmother for her first Communion, Petrópolis (Brazil)⁸.

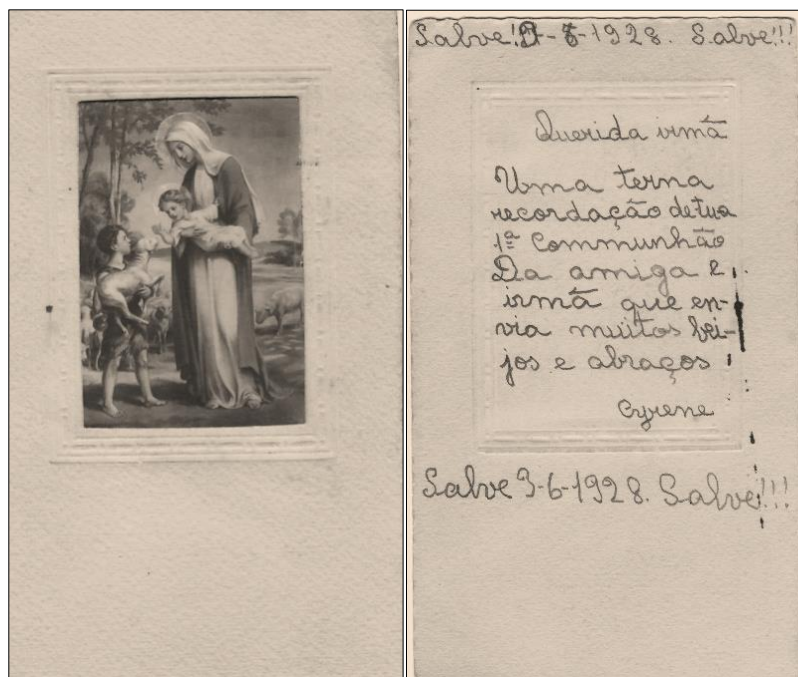


Source: Author’s personal files. Date: 03/06/1928.

⁷ Transcript from the back of the holy card: To my dear daughter, today being the day on which Jesus “cayme” (veiu) (sic) to your heart for the 1st “tyme” (vês) (sic), we offer you this gift to remember this noble day, From your parents, hugging and kissing you, Mummy and Daddy. Greetings! June 3rd 1928.

⁸ Transcript from the back of the holy card: Ruth may you keep forever in your little heart the sweet memory of your 1st Communion. Grandma Maria. 3-6-1928.

Image 5 – Holy card (Santinho) given as a souvenir by sister Cyrene for Ruth's first Communion, Petrópolis (Brazil)⁹.



Source: Author's personal files. Date: 03/06/1928.

The holy cards given as souvenirs on the day of first Communion by family and friends demonstrate a common practice in those days and in that context, extended to everyone who took the rite of passage. Thus, the girls from Sion School would give out their souvenir card and get one from their colleagues and all the guests to the celebration.

In a specific study on “santinhos”, Grazziotin and Bastos (2017, p.576-577) state that the practice of distributing these first Communion souvenirs¹⁰ “relate to the daily life of Catholic Faith, which in our society is very closely linked to the school context, even when taking the 20th century as a time reference”. To the authors, at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, private as well as public state-run schools are spaces for religious development, notwithstanding the secularity of education aspired to by republican ideals, with first Communion being a rite promoted within educational institutions.

Grazziotin and Bastos (2017, p.579-560) indicate that remembering the first Communion “immediately takes one back to memories of the practice of exchanging holy cards with one's colleagues”, whose presence can be verified since the 18th century, “initially in black and white, coloring up gradually”, just as the same materials with which they were made were becoming more elaborate, with the messages being produced by printing offices, in gold, silver or black letters, requiring no more than the signature of the person offering the holy card, and the date.

⁹ Transcript from the back: Hail 3-6-1928. Greetings!!! Dearest sister. A gift to remember with tenderness your 1st Communion. From your friend and sister with lots of kisses and hugs. Cyrene. Hail:3-6-1928. All the best!!!

¹⁰ The study by authors Grazziotin and Bastos (2017, p.578) carried out at Memorial Jesuíta Unisinos, associated to the Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos Library, in São Leopoldo/RS, does not refer only to the first Communion holy cards, but souvenirs for “bereavement and seventh day mass; baptism, confirmation; festivities connected to wedding dates and their ramifications such as silver, golden and crystal weddings; religious consecration of priesthood; religious celebrations organized by secular patrons: for each Catholic ritual, a holy card corresponding to the celebration”.

Ruth was also given printed “santinhos”, but the ones mentioned in this study, given by her family, contained a printed image only on the front, with the back of the card blank for the personal message to be written. As Grazziotin and Bastos (2017, p.587) explain, the sale of cards without printed messages, allowing a personal touch, “conferred greater importance to the souvenir, which was given to family members and friends”. The holy cards were usually imported from Europe, and were sold in Brazil at houses of commerce or print shops, as in the case of the holy card offered by Ruth’s father, who was French, and the one offered by her grandmother, which despite indicating a Swiss origin on the front of the card, shows the point of sale on the back: “Casa Sucena – Rio de Janeiro”. With regard to the imagens printed on the front of the holy cards the authors state:

The images destined for First Communion display the symbols for this ritual established by the Catholic Church: the initials “JHS” (Jesus Sacred Host - Jesus Hostia Sagrada); the goblet; the bread, the wheat, the grapes, the fish; the angel; Jesus Christ; the dove; the rosary; the catechism. Some display the angel leading the boy or girl to Church, accompanied by sheep. They are the most frequent ones on albums and display light colours in pastel tones (GRAZZIOTIN E BASTOS, 2017, p.587).

The holy cards offered by Ruth’s family fall into the category of those which contain ritual symbols, with images of the baby Jesus held by His father, Saint Joseph, of Christ himself offering communion and the Blessed Virgin with the baby Jesus next to a shepherd.

In Spain, notwithstanding intense cultural differences, especially in the early 20th century, when there were no globalizing effects in societies, the ritual followed exactly the same pattern, with few singularities. If we then focus on the case in Spain, and sharing the points pertaining to the case in Brazil, we consulted the graphic files in MPFCCEUS, in order to, through a series of photographs, illustrate a few ideas particularly related to first Communion for girls in Spain. With the kind collaboration and generosity of the students from the School of Educational Sciences at the University of Seville, the museum is gradually expanding, increasing its photographic collections and thus converting to a space of memory relative to and for everybody, where every graphic testimony constitutes a clue to the history of education.

Regardless of the social class to which they belonged on the day of first Communion, the girls donned their best clothes and would receive the body of Christ covered in white and well prepared, both inside and out. In villages as well as towns, interior preparation was normally left up to nuns, while external preparation was the duty of mothers and grandmothers, who with care and dedication, would buy or make the best dresses to celebrate such a special occasion in the lives of the girls. To illustrate the occasion, we opted to select two photographs of girls born in villages in the province of Huelva, located in Southern Spain. In Image 6, below, we find young Rosario, with a full body photograph taken in the month of May, month of the Virgin Mary, by a professional photographer, in a scene prepared with symbols relating to the day of her first Communion.

With a circumspect posture and a serene expression on her face, the perfectly dressed and well-groomed girl strikes an immaculate pose, with her hair half gathered up, for a special and unforgettable day. Reserved and showing some shyness, her body is completely covered, including the head, which is covered by a veil symbolizing her purity and her virginity. She is also wearing gloves and is displaying a combination of unique accessories associated to Christian life. She carries a missal with prayers and chants to Jesus and Mary, a rosary (whose wreath of roses signifies trust in the Virgin Mary as

Mother), a medal of religious symbolism, gold earrings and a bracelet. “At your right stands the queen, wearing jewelry from finest gold from Ophir”(Holy Bible. Old Testament. Psalm 45:9). Jesus, who is the word made flesh, is present in the girl’s life through the contents kept in the missal. The missal, which substitutes the Bible, symbolizes the invitation for the girl to enter Christian life. «Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God» (Holy Gospels. Saint Matthew, 4, 3-4). Rosario also carries a small purse, where, as all girls, she would keep her holy cards to give out to family and friends after the festivity as a souvenir for the day. All these accessories were purchased by different family members, who as attendees, would offer the best they could to those girls who were preparing to welcome God forever in their hearts. Entry to the ecclesiastic community, from this day on, presented itself as a reason for pride, especially for practicing Christian families. On this day, the girls were also commended to the Virgin Mary or to other saints, usually the patrons of their towns and villages. In the case of Huelva, the patron to whom the girls were entrusted was the Virgin of la Cinta.

Image 6 – Photograph of Rosario, a girl from Huelva, Spain, on the day of her first Communion.



Source: MPFCCEUS archives. Date: 23/05/1945.

Communion, which originates from the latin word "communio" means "to mutually participate". And it is the moment when, as a community, family, friends and people who share more or less similar religious beliefs are gathered to celebrate the union of one of their members with God, especially if it is a girl, from whom the expectations are for a life of virtue, as with the patron saint.

Along the same lines as the previous photograph, we meet Manuela, in Image 7, a girl from Gibraleón, a village in Huelva, whose patron is Saint Anne (Sant’Ana). The girl, apparently from a middle class family, is wearing an immaculate white dress and matching shoes, and shows herself pure and ready to receive God for the first time. The picture has been taken by a professional and dates from late May, a little before Corpus Christi festivities. Flawlessly covered from head to foot, Manuela poses, smiling and innocent, to perpetuate the joy of such an important date in her life’s calendar. Both the fabric of the dress and the veil that Manuela is wearing are of higher quality than those of the previous photograph. In this case, they are decorated with embroidered strips, to represent the good deeds that this young lady will perform throughout her life. For the occasion Manuela is wearing a cross around her neck instead of a rosary, as the one seen in Image 6. The crucifix reminds us that from that

moment on, the teachings of Jesus are to be followed, each one taking up their own cross. “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me”. (Holy Gospels. New Testament. Saint Matthew, 16:24). In the photo, Manuela is holding a candle that represents the light of Christ, which will guide her and light her path to eternal life, taking on herself the commitment of also being a light in the world. Next to the candle, we find a bunch of white flowers, whose spiritual meaning relates to the need to express, tenderly, a testimony of faith. The white flowers should be construed as a sign of praise, prayer and devotion to Mary, mother of Jesus, an example to be followed by every Christian woman. Once again, the girl is pictured with her prayer missal and her purse. The photograph, shaped like a postcard, contributes towards perpetuating such a sublime Christian memento.

Image 7 – First Communion photograph of Manuela, a girl from Gibraleón, Huelva (Spain).



Source: MPFCCEUS archives. Date: 29/05/1940.

As in the Brazilian case, in Spain the tradition of exchanging holy cards on the day of first Communion among friends and family was a widespread practice all over the country. Holy cards, like photographs, have acted as traces or clues for the reconstruction of educational historic days of yore. They are voiceless objects that speak to us about memories and emotions associated to First Communion as a social, cultural and religious rite. Among them, it is worth noting the role of holy cards, which were a part of these rites in Brazil as well as in Spain, in a very similar manner.

Below, in Image 8, we can see a congratulatory holy card that M^a. Antonia offered to her friend. On the card we see the image of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, an Italian Jesuit priest, patron of youth, who appears represented as a young man, dressed in a black cassock and surplice. His most characteristic accessories are a lily, in reference to his innocence; a cross, in reference to his compassion and sacrifice; a skull, in reference to his premature death; and a rosary, in reference to his devotion to the Virgin Mary. The choice of a holy card with this imagerio illustrate the day of first Communion is definitely not by chance, especially if we consider that a good Christian woman must be pure, obliging, devoted and willing to sacrifice her self for her fellow human being.

Image 8—Holy card offered to a girl by her friend, as a souvenir and congratulating her on the day of her first Communion, Seville (Spain)¹¹.



Source: MPFCCEUS archives. Date: 16/07/1939.

The ritual of distributing holy cards, in Spain, on the day of first Communion corresponds to the desire to immortalize the memory of a significant historical moment in the family, such as the first Eucharist. Holy cards contributed towards providing testimony for the event, and for that reason, details of this ephemeris were described on the back. First of all, appeared the name and surnames of the girl who was taking communion for the first time, preceded by a drawing of a goblet or the body of Christ. Below came the name of the parish Church or chapel where the first Communion was celebrated, the date and the name of the respective village or town. The holy cards were usually made of parchment paper and/or of another type of quality material, with golden or silver motifs and on the front, a figure or illustration of an angelical or Marian character.

There follow, in Image 9, several models of holy cards, both vertical and horizontal, with the entries confirming the records marked. Young Elvira Hitos Cortez took her first Communion in Huelva, on May 17th, 1937, at Colégio do Santo Ángel de la Guardia, and to perpetuate this day she offered to her family and friends a holy card on which an angel placidly poses sideways, and to the right of the angel we see an image of the sacred host. The School belongs to the Congregation of the Sisters of Santo Ángel de la Guardia, which was founded in 1880, as the first school in town, which served primarily for the education and training for girls, with preference given to those from the social strata in greater need.

¹¹ Transcript from the back of the holy card: Muchas felicidades te desea tu amiga que pide por tí a Jesús. M^a. Antonia Jurado. Sevilla - 16-7-39. (All the very best, from your friend who commends you to Jesus).

Image 9 – Photographs of holy cards remembering the first Communion¹².

Source: MPFCCEUS archives. Date: 1937.

According to Grazziotin and Bastos (2017), holy cards represented much more than simply a printed image; they possessed “symbolic value”, and the practice of their distribution moved beyond national borders, and could be found in different societies, with identical features relating to the subjectivity of the act of offering, receiving and the symbolism that they conveyed on being distributed on such a solemn occasion.

The similarity between the circumstances involving first Communion in Brazil and in Spain demonstrate, local unique features aside, that the filed educational and religious images relating to first Communion for girls are very close, although the distance separating these countries is dimensioned between both sides of the ocean.

Closing remarks

Based on the analysis of archives holding photographic images of girls, produced in Brazil and in Spain, on the moment of the first Communion, focusing on aspects such as posture, garments, the existing props and symbolism, we realize that religion was present in the school curriculum, through catechism classes, and first Communion was the apex of the preparation of these classes. For this purpose, Catholic catechism was used by both catechist priests and nuns as well as by secular teachers when it came to schools run by the state. According to Pintassilgo (2002, p.555), with regard to primary school education, Catholic religious education is “one of the most important elements in the elementary school curriculum, with the clear and distinct objective of socializing children and youths according to Catholic principles”, which would extend well into the 20th century.

¹² Transcript of the original text from the back of the holy cards, in Spanish: a) Has alimentado Señor a tu pueblo con el manjar de los Ángeles y lo has saciado con Pan Celestial y divino. / Adoremos a Jesús con los Ángeles y pidámosles que le presenten nuestros votos em favor de los seres que nos son queridos. (Mons. De Segur.). b) Recuerdo de la Primera Comuni3n de la niña Elvira Hitos Cortez. Celebrada en la Capilla del Santo Ángel el día 17 de mayo. Huelva, 1937.

The photographic material examined denotes “the interweaving of the first Communion ritual with school culture”, as previously concluded by Jacques (2016, p.12), based on interviews, which corroborate the close relationship between first Communion and school practices, defining it as a ritualistic moment within the context of the school timetable itself.

Additionally, it can be established that first Communion was a ritual with striking female protagonism, where the role played by boys was that of supporting cast to the girls, whose pose, clothing and garments conveyed meanings relating to the profession of faith required at the moment of the Eucharist.

Although they were the main protagonists of the “inclusive social pact” and the rite of passage for initiation to Catholic Christian conscious life, greater responsibility was also placed on them to keep to the sacrament received, as well being more rigorously imposed upon with regard to observing their social, moral and sexual conduct. As for the boys, the supporting cast members of the ceremony, there was also less rigor regarding the marks from the formative period, which sometimes involved these pacts, and there was greater flexibility in the concept of sins.

It is certain that the Church allied to school constituted, together with the family, a powerful formative triumvirat, with it not being possible not to follow the rites established in the CDC in force, which passed on to all the responsibility in the formation of the young Catholics. As demonstrated by the images photographed and the writings on the holy cards given as souvenirs, first Communion was a mandatory rite of initiation, and up until relatively recently, the most important in every girl’s childhood phase. The older first Communion photos, worn out by time, refer to this theme that has been cast aside from a historical point of view, but which is necessarily bound to our memory and needs to be historicized.

In their best clothes and attire compatible with their social status and their financial situation, the girls were prepared physically and spiritually to receive Jesus for the first time, on the highly celebrated day of their first Communion. It must also be acknowledged, however, that this practice was quite far from inclusive, for the girls from families with limited financial resources, who could not afford all the expense the occasion required, felt the uncomfortable difference in having to attend and watch the religious act in much simpler and more modest dresses than the other girls, when the dresses weren’t borrowed or handed down out of charity.

Nevertheless, the act of first Communion has historically been the party par excellence for the whole Family and the ecclesiastical community; and the photographs associated to the history of this religious act highlight the moments of joy and jubilation experienced by all when celebrating the event. Furthermore, in both countries, Brazil and Spain, the girls’ dresses for the day of their first Communion are memorial milestones, which endure forever, even for those whose photographs have been lost, or for financial reasons were not photographed, proving that those items of clothing represented much more than a mere garment on that very special day.

However, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the rapid changes that can transform rites can also lead to the abandonment, during a period of transition, of objects considered in disuse. In this regard, the photographs of the girls on the day of their first Communion, as well as the holy cards, are presented as interesting iconographic documents of an educational and historical nature, that need to be thoroughly analyzed by researchers, considering that they can help to reconstruct and interpret passages in the history of women’s education.

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