In the Gospel of John 14:2, Jesus says to his disciples: “In my Father's house there are many dwelling places.” This statement of Jesus could be easily interpreted as a—metaphorical—representation of a situation which now more than ever seems evident and urgent: religious pluralism is such a complex and global phenomenon of the legitimization of diversity in the domain of faith (Giordan 2010), that in the wide range of possibilities it includes, everyone can find his or her own way of establishing (or not establishing) a relationship with the sacred, with the transcendent and with God and of feeling “at home” with Him.

The expression “now more than ever” has not been used by chance. Indeed, for some decades now a radical and unprecedented process of change has taken place in the relationship individuals have with the sacred. This process has led the individual from being subordinate to the authority of the traditional religious power to having more independence and freedom—not just of the choice of a religious “label,” but also of its expression. In other words, there has been a spiritual change, or revolution, which has affected the contemporary world of religious faith and practice in its entirety, leading both to the emergence of new ways of relating to the sacred and, in part, to the renewal of traditional religious forms. In this radical metamorphosis, the role of the body, of feelings and of personal wellbeing, also seems to have changed. These elements are indeed no longer seen as being in contradiction to or in competition with the search for a significant relationship with the sacred (Giordan 2010). On the contrary, their reinterpretation in a transcendent perspective is one of the main factors that play a decisive role in shaping the outcomes of this search, leading to journeys of faith that are often on the fringe of or outside of traditional churches.

The aim of this chapter is to assess the possibility of establishing a connection between these two thematic areas: religious pluralism on the one hand and the “new” concept or model of spirituality on the other. In particular, their concurrence (or lack thereof) will be empirically tested with
regard to the ritual dimension of a specific system of religious beliefs in Italian Catholicism. However, this study will not focus on the center of the Church, but rather on its periphery, where the search for a significant relationship with the sacred has more opportunities to achieve its aim—including through the production/creation of rituals that are parallel or alternative to the official model.

More specifically, this chapter will focus on the rituals of Renewal in the Spirit,1 a post-Conciliar religious renewal movement which is the largest charismatic movement in Italy recognized by the Catholic Church. Is it possible to interpret the approach adopted by the members of this movement in “their” rituals through the concept/model of spirituality? If so, what effects does it have on their way of relating to the sacred and to the transcendent and what are the differences from “average” Catholics? Finally, how do these experiences (and their outcomes) help differentiate religious approaches within Italian Catholicism and increase pluralism?

**Old Terms for New Scenarios**

The term “spirituality” has been used in the sociological field for some decades now to indicate a “new” category used for the description, interpretation and understanding of the different relationship with the sacred that characterizes the contemporary religious world. However, as demonstrated by Giordan, the term is not “new” in itself. The term is indeed much older, and it was first used in the theological field, from which it was taken. Its adoption in a completely different period and field of study has obviously changed its usage and meaning. What has remained unchanged is the tendency to use this term to indicate a “reserve” of independence and creativity which both individuals and groups or communities maintain faced with the official religious institutions (Giordan 2006).

Although among sociologists of religion the debate on the use of this category is still open and rather heated (cf., Roof 1993, Heelas and Woodhead 2005, Flanagan and Jupp 2007), its usage highlights the presence of this reserve. Today, a central role in this reserve is also played by the freedom of choice of individuals, by their need for meaning and to fulfil themselves:

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1 The data used in this chapter were collected for a thesis written to complete the Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of Padua (2011). This was a qualitative research project based on ethnographic analysis and in-depth interviews. The first part of the results was already presented in a previous article (cf. Contiero 2012).