SPIRITUALIZATION: SPIRITUAL PLURALIZATION AND SCIENTISTS IN ITALY

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The story of different cultures and religions characterized by the porosity of their borders, which makes them fluid rather than monolithic and homogeneous entities, confronts us with the complexity of the contexts within which they form. The notion of religious pluralism crosses that of spiritual pluralism, as well as the concept, partially different, of “spiritual pluralization.” As a matter of fact, “spirituality” can be defined in two ways, either in terms of a connection with a religion or in terms of a free quest on the part of a subject who opens up to changeable experience going beyond religious boundaries. The distinction refers to what has been defined as traditional spirituality as contrasted to quest spirituality (Wuthnow 1998). However, this second meaning, where the protagonists are the subject and its free quest is detached from adhering to specific systems of meaning, raises questions that force us to develop new concepts and to recalibrate the instruments we have at our disposal in order to be able to grasp them. If we reason within the framework of religious pluralism, no doubt we can identify even a pluralist spiritual experience of the traditional type, organized and run by the various religions.

By contrast, if spirituality is distinguished from religion (Heelas et al. 2005), rather than speaking of a spiritual pluralism, we may speak of spiritual pluralization to identify and define the different characteristics that experiences with the sacred and the quest for meaning assume, according to the social worlds that cross the boundaries of traditional religions. This classification effort is important for two main reasons. First, it highlights how, together with the “religious and spiritual” people, there are others who define themselves as “spiritual, not religious” who have been neglected because they cannot be defined within the traditional indicators of religiosity. Second, and the case of the spirituality of atheist scientists is emblematic (Ecklund and Long 2011, Sbalchiero 2012), we observe how, outside the boundaries of religions, the nature of spirituality presents common traits, but at the same time also novel features, depending on the social groups.
and the contexts within which the different experiences take place. In this sense it seems appropriate to speak of a process of “spiritual pluralization.”

Secularization, Implicit Religion and Spirituality

The unstoppable secularization process, indicating the dissolution of the sacral-magic system of explaining the world, besides having never reached its accomplishment, has also not exhausted the human impetus toward quests and the experience of what is radically different and supernatural (Acquaviva and Pace 1992). Recognition of this anthropological need emphasizes that individuals cannot refrain from questioning themselves about the meaning of their own existence, and to some extent it has marked a change of perspectives in the scholars of the religious phenomenon, fostering analytic proposals on the persistence of the religious dimension in “new forms” (Filoramo 1986, Beckford 1990). It is in this context that new approaches have developed: “invisible religion” (Luckmann 1963), “rumor of angels” (Berger 1969), “hidden Christianity” (Burgalassi 1970), “civil religion” (Bellah 1975), “religion of the scenario” (Garelli 1986), “scattered religiosity” (Cipriani 1988), “implicit religion” (Bailey 1997, Nesti 1985)—all of which are useful for indicating new directions to the sacred in the contemporary context. Far from disappearing, the “hunger for the supramundane” (Ferrarotti 1983) has participated in the process of redefining traditional religious forms, especially through syncretism (Pace 1992, 1997, Lucà Trombetta 2004, Giordan 2006).

In an attempt to resacralize the world and find meaning, the individual can now resort to an authentic “Do It Yourself” religion, tapping into the new expressions of the religious phenomenon available in the “spiritual marketplace” (Roof 1999). In the panorama of the interpretative models of religions, the paradigm of “implicit religion” (Bailey 1997, Nesti 1985) and the more recent concept of “spirituality” (Wuthnow 1998, De Marco and Miniati 2006, Giordan 2006, Lanzetti 2006) appear to be central in an attempt to understand the traces of the sacred in border areas extending beyond the traditional forms of religion, without necessarily taking refuge in secularism. The fundamental thesis of implicit religion consists in the possibility, in contemporary society and culture, of tracing the religious experience in the most various ambits of individual and collective activity, enhancing those purely sacred tracks of the experience that have remained unnoticed because they were attributed to the framework of the profane and the ordinary (Bailey