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Gods of “Second Modernity”: Religion and Spirituality from Ulrich Beck’s Sociological Perspective

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Abstract

This paper aims to deepen Ulrich Beck’s contribution to the analysis of the religious dimension in contemporary society within the broader theorization of the “risk society”.

To this end, I briefly discuss the question of desecularization in the introductory section. In the second I outline in a very synthetic way the distinctive features of religion and the new forms of spirituality, suggesting a possible defining line of demarcation between the two phenomena starting from the different relationship with the transcendence that these two phenomena have. In the third, I summarize the main characteristics of the “risk society”, those that in my opinion are most closely linked to the desecularization process. In the fourth, instead, I analyze what I consider Ulrich Beck’s greatest contribution to the sociology of religion, highlighting some similarities and differences with other previous theories and, therefore, his original contribution. In the conclusions I summarize the results of the reasoning, motivating why Beck’s theory about “a God of one’s own” is a useful conceptualization capable of shedding light both on the phenomenon of religion and new forms of spirituality in the “risk society”.

Keywords: religion, spirituality, “risk society”.

1. Introduction: some observations on the desecularization process

The analysis of the role that the sacred has in contemporary society is a very hard question. First of all, some clarifications need to be made. The belief that the contemporary society would be a secularized society is quite widespread

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in common sense, and not only. Nothing more wrong. From this point of view, the social sciences help us to refute this generalized belief. In “risk society”, the social relationship with the sacred is alive and in a very significant way. Religion is not the only way in which this relationship is revealed. The sacred presents itself to the observer with very different figurations. New forms of spirituality are gaining more and more devotees, for example (Palmisano, Pannofino, 2021). It is also possible that the coexistence of many options of faith causes *eo ipso* further transformations of the social relationship with the sacred. All of this can be the subject of public and scientific debate, as it indeed is. However, what has been said does not mean that secularization has not produced any effect. For example, the “differentiation” between different institutional spheres; the increased “autonomy” among these spheres; the “rationalization” of large sections of social life thanks to technical and scientific innovations, are elements that we cannot ignore (Tschannen, 1991).

Having made these preliminary clarifications, what can hardly be denied – if not at the cost of grandiose forcing – is the desecularization process that has already been underway for several decades (Berger, 1999a). To the point that it is legitimate to wonder even about the ever disappearance of the sacred from the social scenario. For example, the unavoidability of religious processes is pointed out (religion here must be understood in its etymological sense) by several scholars. These processes would reinforce social relationships, giving the activity of human beings a superior meaning to just the procedural, abstract, and rationalizing dimension of social life (Mongardini, 1994).

Thomas Luckmann argues, for example, that the phenomenon of secularization is nothing more than a “myth” of the social sciences. In modern society, there is a growing “differentiation” of the spheres of the meaning of everyday life from those of the “sacred cosmos”. However, on a subjective level, a real secularization has never been (Luckmann, 1969). In essence, religion would become a private affair of the subjects by an original modulation of one’s personal “sacred cosmos” and a concomitant eclectic relationship with transcendence (Luckmann, 1967, 1990). Yet, it must be added, other authoritative scholars point out that religion – especially starting from the last decades of the twentieth century – is anything but disappeared from the public arena (Casanova, 1994).

Detailed research conducted by Grace Davie showed how the predictions of secularization theories would work only concerning the European continent, albeit with significant differences depending on the nations considered (Davie, 1999). Already the United States, to remain in Western society, represent a case in which the predictions of secularization have proved largely fallacious. But what is interesting is that they are not the United States the exception to the theoretical model of secularization: it is Europe with its widespread secularism

on the contrary, from this perspective, that represents a deviation from the norm (Berger, Davie, Fokas, 2021; Davie, 2003).

In short, contemporary society is not the scenario in which the gods disappear. Indeed, we are witnessing a proliferation of religious and spiritual landscapes, so subjects can freely decide which "altar" they prefer (Berger, 2014). Now, to be precise, it is not at all necessary to refer to gods to speak of the relationship with the sacred in the "second modernity". The altar to which to consecrate one's faith can coincide with the green depth of wood or with the blue embrace of the ocean (Taylor, 2007) in those forms, for example, of social relationship with the sacred that belongs to the constellation of "Ecospirituality" (Choné, 2017; Camorrino, 2020). But on the aspect that concerns the new forms of spirituality, I will have the opportunity to return briefly later. What scholars would seem to agree – albeit with due exceptions – is the statement that "late-modern" society, from a religious point of view, can be defined as "pluralistic" (Berger, 2005). That is, a multiplicity of forms of belief coexist in a gigantic condominium of faith that has planetary extension. This coexistence has sociological implications of the utmost importance. First of all, each individual finds himself in the unprecedented (and complicated) condition of being forced to choose what to believe: even if he chose to believe absolutely nothing, however, this subject would have made a choice (Berger, 1979). This coercion to choose together with constant "reflexivity" of the subject on the choices gradually taken is, in fact, one of the greatest expressions of the "radicalization" of modernity (Giddens, 1996). This vast – even indefinite – opportunity for choice is not without cost. A certain degree of deterioration of "ontological security" (Giddens, 2006) is precisely the effect of this growing expansion of the horizon of choice.

Yet, in an apparently paradoxical way, it is precisely this generalized weakening of the "plausibility" of a unitary scenario that engenders the ideal conditions for the rebirth of a social need for existential stability (Berger, Luckmann, 1991). In other words, we could say that the degree of "loss" tolerable by the human being knows limits (Berger, Luckmann, 1995) which, once overcome, nourish the ground for an overbearing "return of the sacred": the moral horizon of society may have undergone a detachment from the religious one, but the need for subjects to find firm answers to fundamental existential questions has remained unchanged (Bell, 1978). The conflictual coexistence between spheres of different values and a general compression of the influence of religion on other institutional spheres has resulted in a certain degree of "disenchantment" (Weber, 2010). But this does not mean at all – and it is possible to trace this intuition in the same pages by Max Weber – that the urgent question of ultimate meanings does not give new strength to religious movements or movements with similar meaning functions (Séguy, 1986). The

process of “disenchantment” as its “unintended consequence” – to use Weber’s words – may have itself contributed to causing the process of “re-enchantment of the world” (Maffesoli, 2018; Camorrino, 2021b).

In the next section, I outline in a very synthetic way the distinctive features of religion and the new forms of spirituality, suggesting a possible defining line of demarcation between the two phenomena starting from the different relationships with the transcendence that these two phenomena have. In the third, I summarize the main characteristics of the “risk society”, the features that in my opinion are most closely linked to the desecularization process. In the fourth section, on the other hand, I analyze what I think is Ulrich Beck’s greatest contribution to the sociology of religion, highlighting some similarities and differences with other previous theories and, therefore, his original contribution. In the conclusions I summarize the results of reasoning, arguing that Beck’s (2010b) theory about “a God of one’s own” is a useful conceptualization capable of shedding light both on the phenomenon of religion and new forms of spirituality in the “risk society”.

2. Religion and spirituality: an attempt at defining starting from the social relationship with transcendence

The anthropological fact by which the subject understands himself as superior to the mere sum of organic functions, automatically opens the doors to transcendence (Luckmann, 1988). The experience of transcendence can take very different forms. We could also say in simmelian terms that transcendence finds different social forms that organize the affective contents of which “religiosity” is the driving force (Simmel, 1993). It is plausible, as Thomas Luckmann argues and as I briefly recalled above, that the relationship with the sacred in modern society has progressively shifted its place of manifestation from “great transcendences” to “small transcendences”: the “ultimate meanings” no longer refer to a “sacred cosmos” shared and “taken-for-granted” by the entire community, but to a more incoherent and eclectic personal construction of a horizon of “privatized” meaning (Luckmann, 1990).

However, the fact that today this transcendence takes on different social forms is by no means indifferent to the normative and moral power that these forms can exercise on the meaning given by the subjects to their conduct and their beliefs. That is, if a ritualized conduct allows access to sources of meaning “totally other” (Otto, 2009) than the ordinary experience, the sacredness given to such conduct will have an exceptional power capable of enormously reinforcing the authority of that specific belief (Luckmann, 1987). The power of sacred authority is directly proportional to the capacity of the moral and value

order imposed by the belief to escape the sovereignty of human beings, first of all for what pertains to its genesis (Gauchet, 1992). This fact has enormous implications when tradition, understood as an intergenerational process of transmitting memory shared by a community, loses its stable and transcendent anchors (Hervieu-Léger, 1996). In summary, the social relationship with the transcendent sphere is, especially if we refer to the legitimization process (Luckmann, 1986), the result of a peculiar relationship with temporality (Camorrino, De Angelo, 2020: 104-106). The unquestionable authority of transcendence is based – following the thesis by Mircea Eliade – on the manifestation of what refers to an “*illo tempore*” elusive to the critical grasp of humans: the sacred nature of the world or some of its parts derives directly from this subtraction of the existing from the physiological corruption of becoming (Eliade, 2009). The sacred, we could say with Weber, gives social reality the inviolable consistency of “immutability” (Weber, 1980). It is for these precise reasons, that even where it would be altogether impracticable, “a tradition is invented” – according to Eric J. Hobsbawm – to anchor in a firm and remote framework of reference, practices, and beliefs that are often much more recent and “uprooted” (Hobsbawm, 1987).

This is an aspect of the utmost importance, in my opinion, especially when one is interested in marking, on the analytic level, a clear dividing line between the concepts of religion and spirituality. In the sociology of religion, the debate around the phenomena of religion and the new forms of spirituality is very complex, if not controversial (Palmisano, Pannofino, 2018). We hypothesize that the relationship with transcendence can be the distinction between what pertains to the field of religion and what, instead, resolving itself into the immanent sphere, pertains to the field of spirituality. However, the diffusive concept of “energy” typical of the new forms of spirituality (Albanese, 1993) seems also affect religious beliefs: more and more also in the field of religion the concept of the God-person is transformed into “spirit or vital forces” (quot. in Cipriani, 2020: 220). This evidence already shows a weakening of the social relationship with transcendence also in religion. Nevertheless, in religion (I refer exclusively to the Christian religion), some degree of transcendence persists. However, it should be recognized that the question relating to the social relationship with transcendence becomes even more complex by a process – in the words of Jean Séguy – of “metaphorization” of the horizon of meaning of religion: the reference to values retains a sacred *nuance* but increasingly disconnected from concrete references to the otherworldly (Séguy, 1988).

Instead, the partial overlap between the horizon of salvation and health is an exemplary case of the primacy of immanence in the new forms of spirituality (Secondulfo, 2009). It should be noted, especially in the new forms of spirituality, how much health occupies a central, if not crucial, place (Filoramo,

1995). To be honest, even in religion, the question of the body healed through the miracles of Christ, for example, is very relevant (Synnott, 1988). Nonetheless, in the new forms of spirituality, it is the universe itself that responds to the needs of human beings. In a sort of *energetic holism* – synthesizing the studies by Catherine Albanese – the harmony of the subjects with the “flow” of the forces that animate the universe, implies an inner transformation (Albanese, 1999). This harmony causes a kind of cosmic well-being, but it does not guarantee salvation because the horizon of meaning of spirituality does not go beyond the immanent level. The cosmology of the new forms of spirituality – especially in the New Age versions – has not clear boundaries between matter and spirit, body and mind. The energy – always following Albanese – that permeates the world takes the form of an “aura”. If well-fed, the aura of each individual will be able to reveal the state of cosmic harmony between the subject and the universe. Spirituality is based on a more “therapeutic” rather than soteriological metaphysics (Albanese, 2000). However, it should be noted that a certain “therapeutic attitude” has also influenced the forms of religious belief, especially through psychoanalysis (Bellah et al., 1996). But the New Age, for example, almost equates health with salvation. Healing is the goal of spiritual practice understood as the harmonic reconstruction of the microcosmic balance with the macrocosmic one (the macrocosmic level in the new forms of spirituality is still immanent) (Berzano, 1999). Furthermore, the new forms of spirituality, referring to an intangible essence but common heritage of all humanity, would open the doors to a more inclusive horizon than that of religion, the latter more exclusive towards other religions and beliefs (King, 1996).

There are, however, other relevant distinctions concerning the phenomena of religion and spirituality. The first is more centered on dogmatic beliefs and practices, which refer to the institutional level and a community dimension; the second reflects a universe of more eccentric, creative, and self-centered practices and beliefs (Giordan, 2004). Even if, it should be emphasized, also in the new forms of spirituality, the dimension of the community is by no means absent (Wuthnow, 2003).

3. “Risk society”: “uncertainty” and “inability-to-know”

The distinctive feature of “risk society” rests on its constitutive nature of uncertainty: the fixed stages that strengthened the trajectories of traditional and modern biographies no longer give any precise indication to “late-modern” and “post-modern” individuals (Bauman, 1999). The unprecedented nature of the dangers that threaten everyday life means that these dangers largely elude the

possibility of individual control (Beck, 1987). Indeed, more: scenarios of global catastrophe threatened by climate change or the recent COVID-19 pandemic even seem to escape the possibility of the complete sovereignty of collective institutions. Especially in the face of emergency landscapes of this magnitude, it is correct to speak of a regime of "inability-to-know" (Beck, 2009a). What we could define as the "checkmate" of the "risk society" relates to the awareness that this condition of constitutive uncertainty is not – following Beck's assertion – the *dark fallout* of the complete unfolding of modern logic, but the material attestation of its victories: it is in this apparent paradox that the destabilizing effect of the "second modernity" is hidden. Furthermore, the damage caused by the most advanced peaks of industrialization cannot be adequately compensated (Beck, 2011). In essence, modernization is "reflexive" because it erodes the authoritative foundations of this same process as it proceeds (Giddens, 1999a): the threats that the subjects of the "second modernity" have to face are for the most part "side effects" of this advance (Beck, 1999a). In the light of what has been said, the feeling of suffering a condition of subjection "that does not provide for compensation" spreads in society.

It is necessary here to specify, however, how much this perception, the ideal terrain for the emergence of a widespread "resentment", is largely overdetermined due to a profound change in collective sensitivity: never as in contemporary society has free expression of individual desire, certainly not without bitter and painful counterparts (Girard, 1999). It is no coincidence that one of the biggest problems of contemporary society is how to understand the licit limit of human action. It is not a new issue, going back at least to the origins of Western society (Vernant, 2001). But the scope of the questions is new, given the unprecedented expansion of the technoscientific universe in "late modern" society (Jonas, 1990; Pacelli, 2013; Camorrino, 2019).

In any case, the process of self-erosion of the shared basis of knowledge depends in part on the typical dynamics of the production of scientific knowledge in the "second modernity": experts incessantly negotiate the veracity of this knowledge (Giddens, 1999c), often opposing each other and thus producing, on many vital issues, a condition of "all-pervading insecurity" (Beck, 1999b: 241). Scientists, that is, those who deal with bringing phenomenal reality in front of the court of criticism, find themselves being summoned as defendants, judged by other experts (nothing new) but also by non-experts (here is the news!) (Giddens, 1999b).

In short, this constitutive atmosphere of uncertainty creates the conditions for the emergence and dissemination of practices and beliefs capable of mitigating the "eschatological anxiety" (Kermode, 1972) caused by this state of affairs. Science alone is unable to resolve the ancestral anxieties arising from the fundamental questions of existence. Not only because it cannot in any way

concern itself with the ultimate meanings of human life (Weber, 2004). But, moreover, because science is today perceived with an increasing degree of suspicion. Science is seen as an institution – according to the studies by Ulrich Beck – which produces on the one hand technical remedies, progress, and well-being but, on the other hand, “side effects”, reductionism and destruction: this is the ambivalent sentiment towards science which is affirmed in the “risk society” (Beck 1992).

Furthermore, as I said in the previous section, the strength of the meaning concerning the promise of salvation cannot be reduced to the much narrower horizon of health. If we wanted to summarize the question, we could say that the horizon of meaning of health (domain of science) and that of salvation (domain of the sacred) do not coincide. Even less today, where scientific activity is also perceived as a vector of the devastation of the biosphere and therefore potentially of each organism that is part of it (Beck, 2010a). The promise of unstoppable well-being formulated by modern science has therefore found many more obstacles in its path than expected: it has not been possible to fully accomplish the “health project” imagined by modernity (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Indeed, the extraordinary development of the possibilities inherent in medical innovations raises ethical and moral problems to which non-sacred knowledge struggles to give effective and lasting answers (Beckford 1992). Just as an example, think of the question of gestational surrogacy: the extent of these technoscientific acquisitions gives the measure of the – in the words of Beck – “metamorphosis” of the underlying framework in which undisputed phenomena such as motherhood (undisputed phenomenon just from the technical/natural point of view) become for the first time in history the object of fiery debates (Beck 2016; Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2012). That is, the expansion of the universe of technical possibilities (Ellul, 2009) now incorporates phenomena that have always been characterized by an inviolable nature: the rewriting of the boundaries of the nature of motherhood thanks to technology has itself recovered aspects of sacralization, albeit of an essentially imaginal and symbolic nature (Camorrino, 2021a).

In “late modern” society (here and throughout the rest of the paper I am limiting my observations to Western society), precisely because of this perception of “walking on the crest of the limit”, a generalized feeling of anguish about the possibility of being faced with the materialization of a catastrophe at any moment is spreading. This continuous atmosphere of “anticipation of the catastrophe” (Beck, 2009a) can give an apocalyptic color to future scenarios. An ideal atmosphere, all in all, for the flowering of millennial narratives also in the social sciences (Alexander, Smith, 1996): the fact that such apocalyptic scenarios are the “manufactured” product (Beck, 2009b) of human activity amplifies the social need to turn, in search of salvation, *toward elsewhere*.

Especially in a climate of growing distrust of institutions, where suspicion surrounds all human activity, and a conspiracy always seems to be around the corner (Aupers, 2012). This is dramatically even more evident in the pandemic context where very deep emotional tensions have risen to the fore in the public scene in the form of conspiracies of all kinds (Camorrino, 2021c). Be careful though. The above does not at all mean that contemporary Western society is more dangerous than those that preceded it. Indeed, the opposite is certainly true (Ewald, Mongin, Roman, 2002): it simply seems increasingly immoral that there may be risks that threaten the survival of individuals, especially if these potentially lethal risks are produced by human beings themselves: it is the "immorality" of "guilt" that is culturally difficult to bear that makes a risk perceived as unacceptable (Douglas, 1991).

Thus, in the presence of such a state of perceived precariousness, devices of meaning are forcefully affirmed on the social scene capable of countering this condition of uncertainty more or less effectively. Even the ecological movement and its widespread diffusion give us the measure of a renewed moral horizon capable of cementing new and very broad communities of values in a critical position toward the society (Beck, 2001; Camorrino, 2018).

4. Ulrich Beck's contribution to the analysis of religion and spirituality in the "risk society": "a God of one's own"

It is in this broader analytical framework that, in my opinion, we can best appreciate the contribution of Ulrich Beck to the sociological investigation of religions and spirituality. The well-known German sociologist underlines how much in the "second modernity" what he called "a God of one's own" (Beck, 2010b) is spreading. I would like to propose an analogy between what Ulrich Beck says in the first pages of his volume about Etty Hillesum, a young Jewish woman who during the Second World War through the pages of a diary, tells of her special relationship with God. According to Beck, when Etty prays to God she is speaking to the deepest part of herself. We could say that the expressive element becomes the cornerstone of Etty's relationship with God: the relationship with transcendence, in the form of the "own personal God", is hidden in the intimacy of a dialogue which, at the limit, is a profound dialogue with the Self (Beck, 2009c: 4 ff.); and what Robert Bellah said about "Sheilaism": Sheila Larson – this young American nurse gives her name to this particular form of religiosity – nurtures her relationship with God by listening to her "little inner voice" (Bellah et al., 1996: 281). A distinction must be made because Etty Hillesum lived the tragedy of Nazism on her skin while Sheila Larson is an American in search of a religiosity very marked by the path of

psychotherapy. Therefore, both seek refuge in God, a God who comforts from the harshness of the world and who serves as the supreme compass to orient themselves in the world. But it should be reiterated, Ety's existential tragedy is incomparable with the much more "late-modern everyday life" experienced by Sheila instead.

We are in the presence of a "privatization" of religiosity (Luckmann, 1967), the result of the intersection of the radicalization of the process of "individualization" and "cosmopolitanization" typical of "second modernity" (Beck, 2009c: 35). Beck's position is not dissimilar in some ways from that expressed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967) in pioneering research on the subject. The "social differentiation" and the flourishing on the global scene of an increasing number of faith options, cause – according to the two famous sociologists – a "pluralistic" social landscape where it is possible to freely choose one's adherence to religious belief (or one can choose not to believe, of course). In other words, secularization has produced a fragmentation of the forms of belief, not their disappearance. This fragmentation reflects not only the condition of the institutional structure but also that of subjective consciences: a "competition" between the various forms of belief in which the individual is the cosmic center and no longer the tradition. That is, the individual becomes a "consumer" within a "religious market" (Berger, Luckmann, 1967: 120).

Beck (2009c) rightly insists on the "cosmopolitan" nature of what he calls "own personal God". The "cosmopolitanism" theme of the "risk society" is, in fact, one of the keystones of Beck's theory. The thesis of "cosmopolitanism" can perhaps be summarized in the phrase according to which the "risk society" is based on an "absence of borders" (Beck, Magatti, Martinelli, 2005: 106). Ultimately, in the "second modernity", according to Beck, any phenomenon, including the religious one, to be adequately understood should be analyzed with a "cosmopolitan gaze": the "uncontrollable" encounter between different traditions and cultures as a result of globalization, causes a radical change of social landscape that would impose a paradigmatic shift on the social sciences (Beck, Magatti, Martinelli, 2005). On the other hand, the very concept of both individual and collective identity changes profoundly in the context of globalization (Beck, 2002). What is interesting to note about what Beck says in this regard is that, from this point of view, the Christian religion and the Catholic Church are by their very vocation, globalizing institutions, that is, indifferent to national borders: the *charism* of belonging derives from adhesion of believers to the Christian community regardless of the subject's place of origin. The universalist *ethos* of Christianity opposes belonging to the kingdom of God to belonging to any nation, class, ethnicity, or status which becomes, from this point of view, an irrelevant fact (Beck, 2009c: 62 ff.). It is important

to underline how much Beck highlights the ambivalent nature of religion which can be both a source of solidarity and conflict between peoples: violence is certainly one of the possible outcome of religious fundamentalism, intended as a perverse and tragic antidote to uncertainty constitutive of the "second modernity" (Beck, 2009c).

One of the main contributions of Beck's (2009c) work to the sociology of religion is to have highlighted the continuity between the process of individualization and the emergence of the "own personal God" in "late modern" society. In other words, the German sociologist is able to highlight the relationship between the identity transformations typical of the "cosmopolitan" phase with those concerning the sphere of the religious. And then that of pointing out the constitutively ambivalent nature of the Christian religion. It has historically had both enormous individualizing and "dispossessing" potential – to use a term by Marcel Gauchet (1992). In this sense Beck observes how much the universalizing potential of religion represents at the same time a potential source of conflict: this apparent contradiction is typical of "late-modern" society, the "era of And" (Beck, 2001). In this regard, Beck's pages on the profound and articulated relationship between the process of individualization and Protestant reform are illuminating. The Protestant reform is understood as one of the main moments in the development of the subject's self-reflection on himself precisely through direct dialogue with God (Beck, 2009c: 127 ff.).

5. Conclusions

It seems to me that the fruitful conceptualization of the "own personal God" is placed, on the analytic level, halfway between the forms of religion and those of spirituality. Beck (2009c) includes in his definition of the phenomenon the transcendence of the Christian God (Christianity is the religion most debated in the book) but associates it with the enormous possibility for each self to build their own personal form of belief. This is a very interesting thesis, rich terrain of further discussions also because it is perhaps not exempt from falling into some possible contradictions. But it must be said, "late modern" (and "postmodern") society is properly characterized by being a place of ambivalence, of the maximum desire for self-determination of the subject mixed with the radical desire of the self to obtain emotional gratification through community recognition (Maffesoli, 1985). The rough path that the individual of the "second modernity" faces in pursuit of these double goals, ultimately passes through an unavoidable step which is the one according to Beck – but also according to Charles Taylor (1992), for example – of the search

for “authenticity of the Self”. This quest represents a crucial dimension of the new forms of spirituality in which the Self, and its authenticity, are the main objects of a special “celebration” (Heelas, 1999). At the same time, Beck (2009c) insists a lot on the “pluralistic” nature of the contemporary religious landscape in which the choice of the “own personal God” is precisely the outcome of a free choice and not the result of an ascribed condition. From this point of view, two important aspects should be emphasized. The first is that the social transformation by which from a society in which – according to Gino Germani – the “prescriptive” condition prevails to one in which an “elective” condition prevails is the heart of the individualization process: in the latter there is no longer any obligation descending from birth but instead the biographical trajectory can be the result of the free choice of the subject (Germani, 1991). The second is that the context of uncertainty in which we are witnessing the process of “desecularization” (Berger, 1999b) is, according with other authoritative scholars, exactly the place of the “pluralization of social life-worlds” (Berger, Berger, Kellner, 1983): modernization, in short, has caused “pluralism” by dissolving any “taken-for-granted” model, but has not at all generated the secularization of the world (Berger, 2011).

Ulrich Beck’s ability to synthesize these two processes by emphasizing the “cosmopolitan” framework in which both unfold, is in my opinion a theoretical operation of the utmost importance. The reflections of the great German sociologist who died prematurely allow us to deepen from another perspective – very rich in ideas – the analysis of the phenomena of religion and new forms of spirituality. Beck’s theory of “a God of one’s own” also allows us to outline some possible strategies of social action to create a more peaceful coexistence between different faiths in a global society. In fact, throughout his entire scientific production, Beck has always looked with great attention to the possible applications on the social context of his conceptual tools. He has always reiterated that the “risk society” brings innumerable threats. But, in an apparently paradoxical way, the very effect of these threats can be the fuel to achieve epochal social improvements and to build a more supportive global community (Beck, 2016).

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