Adam Seligman holds in many books that religions have been and still are eminently traditions, not identities chosen by an autonomous actor: in general people do not “do” religion or “do” identity. The link between religion and identity is neither necessary nor universal. This is a pre-eminently modern phenomenon. Its origins are not in the sphere of either religion or tradition, but rather in the logic of modernity itself. Seligman stresses that the roots of the so-called fundamentalism are of the same nature as the ideology of the social sciences – that is a secular ideology focused on individual and group identity and the realization or as with 19th century romantic-nationalism, the expressive realization of both.

There is in the premodern age an exception, according to Seligman, with Christianity conceived as religio or vera religio (Lactantius and Augustine). But this is a very difficult problem. If this interpretation were historically true, is it connected with the very nature of Christianity or with historical circumstances? I cannot answer this question now.

I think that we have to stress that (also before modernity) religious tradition “is said in many ways” - as it is the case with “being”, according to Aristotle - and that its contents and practices may be very different. We can find a kind of premodern identity in religious traditions. How should we call the struggle of Christians against Arabs and vice versa in the middle ages, but also in India the struggle of Muslims against Hindu “polytheism”? Perhaps we must separate common people who follow tradition from learned people.

Another main topic concerns the problem of managing difference in our societies. In post modernity this is a real problem and there are no easy answers, as Seligman says. I think we have to distinguish between a long-term cultural approach to the problem of religious pluralism where we find out foundations for tolerance in religious traditions and room for education and an immediate political approach. Though related, the approaches remain different. I consider Seligman’s the first one, which is the most important in the long term. In fact something more than the legal procedures of a liberal democratic regime are necessary if we are to develop the ability to live together with differences and social dissonances. Let’s consider some problems.

One problem is the following: are individual rights enough? I believe them necessary, but insufficient. I still believe that our tradition of individual rights is important. In particular: we cannot give up the liberty of changing religious faiths. Nowadays this kind of liberty does not exist in many parts of the world as it did not exist in Europe centuries ago. On the topic of the importance of keeping individual rights in religious communities I agree for instance with Sheila
Benhabib’s statements\(^1\). A useful exchange among different cultures and religious communities requires an institutional frame.

Seligman holds that today there is a strong need of recognition and that “rights do not provide recognition”. The arguments and appeals to indifference do not work when the issues in dispute are those of recognition and of desire. That is true. But I suggest that the ideas of individual rights and of dignity of the individual and that of recognition are not opposed. We can conceive a living polarity between individual and community, individual rights and recognition, constitutional secularism and heteronymous morality. In any case I find very difficult to found individual rights, without a strong concept of the dignity of every person.

I agree with Seligman:

1) That tolerance is to be founded on different cultural and religious traditions reinterpreted in order to give sufficient motivation\(^2\).

That the modern concept of tolerance which has replaced tolerance with rights is often not tolerance at all, but rather some mixture of indifference, realpolitik and the denial of difference. The \textit{aesthetization} of difference is often accompanied by a trivialization of difference. On the contrary a “principled tolerance” posits some point between the absolutism of fundamentalist faith on the one hand and the nihilism of post-modern relativism on the other. The right concept of tolerance holds that we need the others in order to be ourselves. Although the virtue of tolerance must not be isolated (otherwise we would not understand the reason to be tolerant), nor can tolerance be the main function of religions (to think so would be nihilistic), we do affirm that a principled tolerance is the sign of truth and humanity of a religious faith.

But how can we found tolerance within religions? In his works Seligman proposes different foundations of tolerance according to the different religions.

In general Seligman holds that without certitude we cannot motivate tolerance (hence the role of religious faith), and at the same time that we need what he calls epistemological modesty or skepticism in religion. I would say that tolerance exists with the virtues of restraint, fortitude and temperance.

I suggest that, before speaking of epistemological modesty or of skepticism in religious experience, we have to distinguish two different kinds of certitude. Primarily I refer to certitude

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\(^2\) Cf. D. A. Hollinger in M. F. Ignatieff, \textit{Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry}, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2001, p. 125. “The challenge may be less to develop a single minimalist theory of human rights than to coordinate the activities of people motivated by several somewhat thicker theories, and to connect the common denominator of these theories to the actual politics of the world”. Cfr. D. Orentlicher, ibid, p. 156.: “Indeed greater engagement of religion – or more to the point, of plural religious perspectives – by human rights advocates would surely enhance the type of cross-cultural dialogue that operates as a check against absolutism”.

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founded in an experience of sense, in which human desire (or religious sense) finds an answer, but also to “ideological certitude”, non-rooted in an experience of sense, which censures desire and hides deep incertitude and fear. I think that we find ideological certitude in modern religious fundamentalism as well as in other modern ideologies.

The first kind of certitude is tolerant (principled tolerance), because God may speak to me via the others in a way I have not known before (hence the epistemological modesty) and so I can develop dimensions of my own faith I have not considered before, the second one fears the other: not to loose myself I become intolerant. Hence the importance of the analogy, highlighted by Seligman and also by Gadamer, between tolerance and translation. In fact translation saves identity (I have my own language) and otherness (I must understand the other with his own language). According to Seligman, and I agree with him, tolerance has the difficult task of translating desire. It is difficult, because the language of religion addresses Being and seeks to satiate desire through very particular idioms.

I think it useful to understand better tolerance in religion to recall the distinction of a catholic theologian, John Henry Newman in the Development of Christian Doctrine between principles and doctrine. While principles (in a positive sense) are those deep insights and practical certitudes, often implicit (something like the first principles of ethics), deeply connected with our individual experience and with what Newman calls real assent, which do not change very much in time, doctrine, more connected with what he calls notional assent, might change.

According to Newman, a man might adhere in different times to the doctrines of different religions, without changing principles. For Newman along with principles in a positive sense, which imply openness in front of reality and others, there are also principles in a negative sense, i.e., prejudices, which mean closeness in front of reality and the others. Therefore dialogue among men belonging to different religious faiths is possible on the basis of principles, also when doctrines are very different. We can look at the faith of the other somehow with the eyes of the other. Testimony of differences has a value in itself. We can appreciate differences, if they do not hinder the

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4 Cf. A. Seligman, Modest Claims. Dialogues and Essays on Tolerance and Tradition, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 2004, pp. 147-148: “A world denuded of desire is denuded of truth-claims as well. After all is through truth-claims – originally of a religious and/or philosophical nature – that Being was problematized in the dynamic which called forth desire. The privatization of desire (reminiscent of Max Weber’s insights into the privatization of carisma in the modern world) is part of the privatization of truth-claims...concomitant on the belief in a purely instrumental organization of the shared public realms”.
5 Cf. H.G. Gadamer, Das Erbe Europas. Beiträge, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a M. 1989,
possibility of recognition. In order to truly build a dialogue, we have to go in the depth of our traditions, be faithful to ourselves, to the principles in which we believe, to live our peculiar religious experience as an answer to our desire and to religious sense (principles in positive sense) and not as a fearful and ideological attitude (principles in a negative sense)

In fact the authentic human attitude is non-first of all tolerance, but recognition, knowledge of us and of others. I know myself better, knowing the other in his otherness. I understand better my culture and religion, opening myself to the culture and religion of the other. Of course also the opposite is true. I need the other. Here is the place of the golden rule in many cultures and religions. This is the opposite of indifference. From this point of view liberty is not the unique value, but it is a fundamental value. Actually the other might convince me.

Furthermore I agree with Seligman, but also with Jurgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedictus XVI), when they hold that reason can help faith and faith reason in their fight against idolatry.

Finally the testimony of tolerance in a strong sense among individuals and communities might become a kind of paradigm, a concrete universal, causing imitation and reciprocity in a contagious way and helping in finding out more and more the reasons of tolerance.