Citizenship, Religion, Identity: Intensifying Conflicts and New Challenges

Secularization has played a key role in the road to modernization propelled by the Enlightenment. Confinement of religion to the private sphere and even, for some, the “death of religion” has been widely promoted by prominent social thinkers of the XIX and most of the XX century, from Karl Marx to Max Weber. At the dawn of the new millennium, however, religion has reemerged as a contentious social and political public issue both domestically and internationally. The sociologist José Casanova famously coined the expression “de-privatization of religion”, to mark the new worldwide trend, spanning from the US to Iran, that has seen religions claim an increasingly ubiquitous place in the political arena. Furthermore, the loosening of the bounds of state sovereignty and the erosion of the territorial dimension of identity has facilitated the resurgence and proliferation of religions as transnational actors.

The de-privatization and the trans-nationalization of religion have posed major challenges to the traditional models embedded in the principles deriving from Peace of Westphalia through which democracies have managed the relationship between religion and the state. Despite remarkable differences, from a constitutional standpoint, all Western models for managing the relationship between the state and religion are steeped in the normative order issuing from the Enlightenment, and they all adhere to two fundamental principles: separation of Church and State in the public sphere; and protection of freedom of and from religion within the private sphere. Globalization and mass scale migration, however, have put in question the powers of integration of a secularized society. Institutionalized secularization and the transition to liberalism resulted in a state model working against endorsing a conception of the good linked to a particular religion. The crisis surrounding the nation state has positioned religions to become at once major sources of integration of the polity as well as fomenters of vexing challenges against major tenets of the polity’s predominant culture. An important consequence of this trend is a shift in emphasis from the transcendent nature of religion to its cultural and identitarian dimensions. Thus, religion undergoes a process of obfuscation of the divide between the transcendent and the secular and of semantic disarticulation. This is done in order to become either an implicit mainstay engrained in the secular nation’s tradition and culture, or a cultural and identitarian base for challenging prevailing institutional and social mores on constitutional liberty and anti-discrimination grounds. In Western democracies, this process leads to two consequences: on the one hand, it fosters the hegemonic return of Christian culture and tradition in the public sphere, challenging the principle of separation between Church and State. On the other hand, the culturalization of religion facilitates the othering and the marginalization of both non-Christian cultures and Christians who object to the mainstream “culturalization” of their religion in ways they consider to be offensive to their faith. All this has the paradoxical cumulative effect of concurrently lowering the protection of religious freedom and of prompting a proliferation of invocations of culture and identity by
religions in order to couch the defense or spread of religious objectives in the discourse of freedom of expression or equality based anti-discrimination.

The Colloquium will bring together prominent speakers from many countries, disciplines, religious traditions and constitutional cultures to address various salient conflicts and challenges posed by the state of affairs described above, and, where pertinent, to suggest possible avenues towards improvements and solutions in the context of contemporary religiously pluralistic, multicultural, multi-ethnic and ideologically divided constitutional democracies.

**Speakers:**

1) January 18: Professor John Bowen (Anthropology, Washington University at St. Louis) [Columbia]

2) January 25: Professor Jose Casanova (Sociology, Georgetown) [Cardozo]

3) February 1: Professor Susanna Mancini (Law, University of Bologna) [Columbia]

4) February 8: Professor Andrew March (Political Science, Yale) [Cardozo]

5) February 15: Professor Christian Joppke (Sociology, University of Bern, Switzerland) [Columbia]

6) February 22: Professor Kristina Stoeckl (Sociology, Univ. of Innsbruck, Austria) [Cardozo]

7) March 1: TBA [Columbia]

8) March 8: Professor Reva Siegel (Law, Yale) and Professor Douglas NeJaime (Law, Yale) [Cardozo]

**March 15 Columbia break**

9) March 22: Professor Susannah Heschel (Jewish Studies, Darmouth College) [Columbia]

10) March 29: Professor Asli Bali (Law, UCLA) [Cardozo]

**April 5 Cardozo break**

11) April 12: Professor Christopher McCrudden (Law, Queens University, Belfast, and U. of Michigan) [Columbia]

12) April 19: Professor Peter Danchin (Law, Univ. of Maryland) [Cardozo]