RENEWAL, REFORM, AND REVOLUTION IN WESLEYAN EDUCATION:
PERSPECTIVES FOR MULTICULTURAL AND POSTSECULAR SOCIETIES THE 21ST CENTURY

FIRST PART

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<u>Abstract</u>: This paper focuses on Wesleyan and Methodist education, comparing the revolutionary role John Wesley played in the 18th century with the perspectives of contemporary multicultural and postsecular societies. By discussing the development of Wesleyan and Methodist education, its expansion worldwide, and the global challenges found in a variety of settings today, we can consider new ways to engage churches and educational institutions in the Wesleyan and Methodist traditions with contemporary society. This yields a new dialogue that has the potential of making these institutions more relevant to a new generation of students with different or no traditional religious affiliation or connection to Christianity. To address this contemporary issue, we can rely on discussions about "postsecularism," which identify a return to religious spirituality as an influential force in civil society. Coming to terms with these new developments may help schools, colleges, universities, and theological seminaries in the Wesleyan and Methodist tradition to become more relevant in multicultural and postsecular societies.

John Wesley's views on education have been studied sporadically and require a new assessment. Relying on historical and recent research,[1] we can identify five complementary moments and components in his life: the family context, primary and secondary education, curricular and non-curricular higher education, intercultural interactive learning, and continuing spiritual formation. Based on these dimensions, we can define some basic assumptions of Wesleyan education, consider what remains valid, and explore what can be renewed or reformed. By considering these points in relation to global and intercultural challenges we might be able to characterize the revolutionary role of Wesleyan education and its applicability today.

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[1] Ryan, Linda. *John Wesley and the Education of Children: Gender, Class, and Piety* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018).

1. Multidimensional Aspects of John Wesley's Education

A first dimension in the education of John Wesley is his own family. It is commonly known, for instance, that his education started under his mother, Susanna Wesley. She was the daughter of Samuel Annesley, an eminent Puritan Non-Conformist, and married Samuel Wesley, who had studied in Dissenting Academies.[2] The education that Susanna Wesley gave her children was influenced by this background,[3] and was summarized in her letter to her son, John Wesley, in 1732.[4] She refused to send her children to the local schoolmaster, John Holland, and her educational style at home has been summarized as "fearing the rod and crying softly; regular and disciplined hours; conquering the will; learning the Lord's Prayer and other catechisms; learning to read from five years; beatings only when required."[5] Susanna Wesley has been described as a saint-like figure for her role educating her children, but this role is not unique to the Wesleys. Adam Smith considered family education through the mother as the most natural and the best form of education.[6]Relying on practices of the day, Rebecca Davies has now shown that "maternal education" was emerging in the 18th-century Britain as a way to empower women's rhetoric.[7]

A second dimension is related to formal primary and secondary education. John was further educated at Charterhouse School in London and excelled in his studies. In a memorandum he wrote on January 28, 1714, he informs that he was nominated by the Duke of Buckingham – a benefactor of Samuel Wesley – to the foundation of Charterhouse. Edgar Thompson provided much details about this school and documented how the Duke nominated, introduced, and financed Wesley's studies at this famous school, which he always continued to visit, whenever

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[2]   Gibson, William. "Samuel Wesley's Conformity Reconsidered," *Methodist History* 47/2 (January 2009): 68-83.
[3]   Monk, R. C. *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage* (Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1966).
[4]   Wesley, Susanna. "On Educating my Family" in *Susanna Wesley. The Complete Writings* (ed. C. Wallace Jr; New York: Oxford University Press. 1997), 367-376.
[5]   "On Educating my Family," 369-373. See Goodhead, Andrew. *A Crown and a Cross: The Rise, Development, and Decline of the Methodist Class-Meeting in Eighteenth Century England* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 32-37.
[6]   Ryan, *John Wesley and the Education of Children*, 18.
[7]   Davies, Rebecca. *Written Maternal Authority and Eighteenth-Century Education in Britain* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014). See also, Martin, Mary C. "Marketing Religious Identity: Female Educators, Methodist Culture, and Eighteenth-Century Childhood" in Shefrin, J. and Mary Hilton (eds.) *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain*: Beliefs, Cultures, Practices (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 57-76.

he went back to London.[8] While at Charterhouse, Wesley was nominated by his schoolmaster for admission to Christ Church at the University of Oxford in 1720.

A third dimension corresponds to higher education. As he enrolled at the University of Oxford,[9] Wesley studied classics and logic, and started keeping a diary for his daily reflections,[10] which were decodified and analyzed by Richard Heitzenrater in the 1970s.[11] Wesley completed his *Baccalaureus Artium* and was made a Deacon in Christ Church Cathedral in 1725, and then elected as Fellow at Lincoln College, a prestigious position reserved for only twelve scholars. He became a Tutor in 1729 and taught Greek Testament and Logic. When his brother, Charles Wesley, joined Oxford and began a study group, he invited John to lead this group due to his prestige as a Tutor. This group was dedicated extra-curricular time to read the classics, engage in deep theological reflections, and perform weekly liturgical practices. The group became known – at first, pejoratively – as the "Holy Club" and included a member from almost every college in Oxford, including members such as Robert Watsson (Queens), George Whitefield (Pembroke), John Clayton (Brasenose), John Gambold (Christ Church), and Thomas Brougham.[12] The study of John Wesley's academic career indicates a successful path and sheds light in Wesley's university life, shows his role as an intellectual, and reveal his educational leadership as the leader of a group later defined and institutionalized as "Methodists." This study group reveals that there is a parallel dimension of higher education, beyond the formal curriculum, which was really transformative.

A fourth dimension in Wesleyan education is related to a spiritual formation derived from real-life experiences and intercultural encounters, especially Wesley's exposure to Native Americans, African slaves, and German Moravians during his time as missionary in Georgia in 1736. In Georgia, Wesley registers his intention to preach to the Indians, but he was also exposed to enslaved Africans in the Americas and to Europeans. Thus, in a letter to George Whitefield, written from Savannah, he invited Whitefield to join him in Georgia, saying that "here are adults

8 Thompson, Edgar W. *Wesley at Charterhouse* (London: Epworth Press, 1938).
9 Green, V.H. *Religion at Oxford and Cambridge* (London: SCM Press, 1964); Aston, T.H. (ed.) *The History of the University of Oxford* [The Eighteenth Century, Vol. 5] (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).
10 English, John. "John Wesley's Studies As an Undergraduate," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 47 (May 1989): 29-37.
11 Heitzenrater, R. *John Wesley and the Oxford Methodists, 1725-35* (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1972), 493-526.
12 Green, Vivian H. H., *The Young Mr. Wesley: A Study of John Wesley and Oxford* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1961).

from the farthest parts of Europe and Asia and the inmost kingdoms of Africa."[13] Although he publicly expressed his thoughts about Africans and slavery only later in *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, published in 1774, we can infer – by reading his communication with George Whitefield – that he had interactions with Africans. As early as 1739, Whitefield had expressed his opposition to slavery and published a letter to the inhabitants of Virginia, Maryland, and the Carolinas. Wesley was acquainted with the tensions related to British colonialism in other parts of the world, such as the Americas and India.[14] Finally, Wesley also interacted with the Moravians. He was impressed with their calm behavior during a storm in a voyage to the Americas, he lived in their house, he maintained conversations in Latin, improved his German, and participated in their services of singing, prayer, and Bible reading. He translated the Moravian hymns from German into English, and even requested membership in one of their communities.[15] Upon his return from Georgia, some of the Holy Club members went on to London and started a new group, which met in John Hutton's book shop and was later influenced by Peter Böhler and other German Moravians – who were living in London and were connected to the Count of Zinzendorf. Wesley visited the Moravian schools in Germany – in Herrnhut and Jena – and this learning experience had a profound impact upon his pedagogical views.[16] These intercultural interactions were not a mere accident in his life, but important components that eventually led to a deeper process of spiritual formation because the exposure to others can have a humbling effect as well as an educational impact.

Finally, there is a profound process of spiritual formation triggered by his further meetings and reflections on the meaning of biblical passages and liturgical practices he had learned since childhood, a process triggered by his continuous interaction with Moravian leaders upon his return to London in 1738.[17] At this point, Wesley was able to reflect more methodically on his life experiences, relate them to the practices of the Holy Club, and expand them in such a way that they led to the beginning of the Methodist movement. This dimension can be seen in the

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[13] Wesley, John. *Letters*, edited by John Telford (London: Epworth, 1931), vol. I, 205-206. See Carey, Brycchan. "John Wesley's Thoughts Upon Slavery and the Language of the Heart," in *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 85:2-3 (Summer/Autumn 2003): 269-84.

[14] Larkins, Jessie S. "John Wesley among the Colonies: Wesleyan Theology in the Face of the American Revolution" *Methodist History* 45/4 (July 2007): 232-243.

[15] J. Nelson," John Wesley and the Georgia Moravians," *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society* xxiii (1984), 28.

[16] Ryan, *John Wesley and the Education of Children*, 48-50.

[17] Watson, D. L. *The Early Methodist Class Meeting* (Nashville, 1985), l27-133.

creation of the Fetter Lane Society.[18] The point to be highlighted here is that this initiative was directly derived from practices of the Holy Club and combined with the Moravian perspective that Wesley had learned during his missionary experience in the Americas.

> There thus existed in London in February 1738 a small network of societies formed as a result of "awakening" by the Wesleys and Whitefield. These societies had contacts with the larger and older religious societies, to several of which their members belonged, and in which Whitefield's preaching had created a readiness for renewal. This newer network of societies was linked, particularly through James Hutton, with the Oxford Holy Club and its former leaders, John and Charles Wesley, who, in turn, were among the Moravians' main friends in England.[19]

John Wesley's cumulative educational process, building on these various dimensions and stages, and the pedagogical structure developed through the "Holy Club" form what can be called Wesleyan education. This methodological process functions as a precondition for serious theological reflection and liturgical practice – through prayer, singing, and other actions – which ultimately lead to the peculiar combination of rational and spiritual processes – the education of the mind and the education of the heart – in Methodist spiritual formation. Wesley united rationality and spirituality through a methodical process inherited from both the Puritan and Enlightenment influences of his time. Understanding this process can help us understand and interpret a key moment in Wesley's life, which occurred a few weeks after the creation of Fetter Lane Society in London. Wesley famously registers this moment in his diary:

> About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change, which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation, and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

This realization has been viewed as a purely inspirational moment, but it cannot occur without the cumulative, perfectionist, and multidimensional educational approach we observe in

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[18] Podmore, C. J. "The Fetter Lane Society, 1738," in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* XLVI (June 1988), 152.
[19] Podmore, C. J. "The Fetter Lane Society, 1738," 133.

Wesley's life, which prepared him for this moment. This moment is shaped by his early experiences under the influence of his family, it is further enhanced by his formal education, made sharper by his time at Oxford and the collective experiences and exchanges enabled by his participation in the "Holy Club," and included a triple intercultural moment of going to the Americas with the intention to interact with Native Americans and an unexpected encounter with Moravians from Germany. These experiences required some time to be processed personally, theologically, rationally and spiritually, through participation in yet another group process built on the Holy Club methodology, leading to the realization at Aldersgate – upon reflection – that an education of the mind cannot be complete without a change of heart. Wesleyan education must include an open mind and open heart, which lead to a concrete social action.

2. Wesleyan Education as Exemplified by Kingswood School

Based on Wesley's own education, we can qualify the educational practices that he established in his ministry and define them in the concept of "Wesleyan education." After the crucial moment at Aldersgate in 1738, he continued his educational career, bringing together his previous educational experiences and creating an educational program enriched by a deep spiritual devotion and a great commitment to the public expression of faith. Wesleyan education reflects the multidimensional aspects seen above.

As Linda Ryan attests, "a firm advocate of family religion, Wesley argued that it was the responsibility of parents to instruct their children from an early age in the family home."[20] As he and Whitefield were forbidden to preach in many locations, they initiated the practice of air preaching in Kingswood, near Bristol. A first version of the Kingswood School would be erected near this location through Whitefield's efforts and focus on the education of poor children. Wesley would play a more important pedagogical role in the design and administration of another Kingswood School nearby, founded in 1748, with a more elitist focus.[21] His reflections on how this theme can be read in the sermon *On the Education of Children*, on his tract, *A Short Account of the School Near Bristol*, in *A Plain Account of the Kingswood School*, and in *Remarks*

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[20] Ryan, *John Wesley and the Education of Children*, 6-7.
[21] Best, G. *Wesley and Kingswood [1738-1988, 250th Conversion Anniversary]* (Bridgwater: Bigwood & Staple Ltd, 1988). In *John Wesley and the Education of Children*, 6-7, Linda Ryan offers a more critical approach, contrasting the two models and denouncing that Wesley had different models for different people – singling out poor children and girls and offering them an education of lower quality.

on the State of Kingswood School.[22] Based on these reflections, he not only developed his methodology,[23] but also partnered with this brother, Charles Wesley, in producing a collection of songs for the school, *Hymns for Children* (1763), in which he included "At the Opening of a School in Kingswood (June 24, 1748)":

> Come Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
> To whom we for our children cry!
> The good desired and wanted most
> Out of thy richest grace -
> The sacred discipline be given
> To train and bring them up for heaven.

> Answer on them the end of all
> Our cares, and pains, and studies here;
> On them, recovered from their fall,
> Stamped with the humble character,
> Raised by the nurture of the Lord,
> To all their paradise restored.

> Error and ignorance remove,
> Their blindness both of heart and mind;
> Give them the wisdom from above,
> Spotless, and peaceable, and kind;
> In knowledge pure their minds renew,
> And store with thoughts divinely true.

> Learning's redundant part and vain
> Be here cut off, and cast aside,
> But let them, Lord, the substance gain,
> In every solid truth abide,

[22]   Wesley, J. "Sermon 95" in *Works*, Vol. 3, pp. 347-360.
[23]   Mesquida, P. "Metodismo e Educação no Brasil: Formar elites e civilizar a nação", p. 32; Ives, A.G. *Kingswood School in Wesley's Day and Since* (London, Epworth Press, 1970).

> Swiftly acquire, and ne'er forego
> The knowledge fit for man to know.

> Unite the pair so long disjoined,
> Knowledge and vital piety:
> Learning and holiness combined,
> And truth and love, let all men see
> In the whom up thee we give,
> Thine, wholly thine, to die and live.

> Father, accept them through thy Son,
> And ever by thy Spirit guide!
> Thy wisdom in their lives be shown,
> Thy name confessed and glorified;
> Thy power and love diffused abroad,
> Till all the earth is filled with God.[24]

We could spend much ink trying to interpret these words, but they speak for themselves. It is in this him that Charles Wesley famously declares the aim of Methodist education: "Unite the pair so long disjoined, knowledge and vital piety." It is important to note that the wording emphasizes the virtues of Christian education in methodical discipline as well as deep spirituality. Thus, in his rules for his school, in *A Short Account of the School in Kingswood, near Bristol* (1749) as in *Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, John Wesley does not limit himself to the spiritual aspect, but includes pedagogical, administrative and strategic considerations, so that the project could succeed:

> "1. Another thing which had given me frequent concern was the case of children. Some their parents could not afford to put to school. So, they remained like 'a wild ass's colt'. Others were sent to school, and learned at least to read and write. But they learned all kind of vice

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[24] Wesley, John. *A Collection of Hymns*, in *Works*, Vol. 7, 461.

at the same time, so that it had been better from them to have been without their knowledge than to have bought it at so dear price.

2. At length I determine to have them taught in my own house, that they might have an opportunity to read, write, and cast accounts (if no more) without being under almost a necessity of learning heathenism at the same time. And after several unsuccessful trials I found two such school-masters as I wanted - men of honesty, and sufficient knowledge, who had talents for, and their hearts in, the work.

3. They have now under their care near sixty children. The parents of some pay for their schooling, but the greater part, being very poor, do not; so that the expense is chiefly defrayed by voluntary contributions. We have of late clothed them, too, as many as wanted. The rules of the school are these that follow:

First, no child is admitted under six years of age.

Second, all the children are to be present at the morning sermon.

Thirdly, they are at school from six to twelve, and from one to five.

Fourthly, they have no play-days.

Fifthly, no child is to speak in school, but to the masters.

Sixthly, the child misses two days in one week, without leave, is excluded the school

4. We appointed two stewards for the school also. The business of these is:

To receive the school subscriptions, and expend what is needful.

To talk with each of the masters weekly.

To pray with and exhort the children twice a week.

To inquire diligently whether they grow in grace and learning, and whether the rules are punctually observed.

Every Tuesday morning, in conjunction with the masters, to exclude those children that do not observe the said rules.

Every Wednesday morning to meet with, and exhort their parents to train them up at home in the ways of God.

5. An happy change was soon observed in the children, both with regard to their tempers and behavior. They learned reading, writing, and arithmetic swiftly; at the same time they were diligently instructed in the sound principles of religion, and earnestly exhorted to fear God and work out their own salvation

6. For an account of the Grammar School in Kingswood I refer to you to the tract lately published."[25]

The above considerations indicate that theology and spirituality were important, but complemented by educational, technical and even professional dimensions in order to prepare children to exert several activities, professions, and social actions.[26] The teaching of Christian religion was the culmination of this process, aimed at the cultivation of moral virtues. The sixty boys at the school were tutored by six masters (Dr. John Jones, Walter Sellon, Thomas Richards, Richard Moss, William Pencer and Abraham Grou), with the support of five servants (under the supervision of Mrs. Mary Davey). We can note some gender discrimination in the hiring of these tutors, especially in view of Wesley's own experience of being educated by his mother and the growing trend in the 18th century, of putting emphasis on women as providers of early child education. Moreover, while Kingswood opened its doors to children after their sixth year of age, and no one were accepted after completing their 12th year. It seems that after a certain age, there would be no hope for improvement. For Wesley, children would be corrupted by earthly matters by this age.

In any case, the point here is that every detail was, thoroughly thought. In order to educate these children according to his method he added further rules: they should wake up early in the morning, at four o' clock. They should wait until the morning sermon at five, using this time for meditation, reading, singing and praying.[27] The Wesleyan educational method is a consistent application of Wesley's own education, but it also contradicts some of its premises. This is corroborated by the very form how the announcement of Kingswood and the call for matriculation was made:

[25]   Wesley, J. *Plain Account of the People Called Methodists* in *Works*, Vol. 9, pp. 277-279.
[26]   Regarding this point, we can disagree with Linda Ryan in *John Wesley and the Education of Children*, when she affirms that his proposal was merely pietist, austere, and discriminatory. These factors were indeed present in his pedagogy, but they need to be seen in tandem with many other elements, often contradictory.
[27]   Heitzenrater, R. *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, pp. 168f..

"Whereas it has been long complained of, that Children generally spend seven, eight and ten Years in learning only two or three Languages; and that together with these they learn such Vices as probably they never unlearn before:

This is to give Notice,

That in the Forest of Kings-Wood, near BRISTOL, in a good clear air a BOARDING-SCHOOL is now opened, wherein are taught, at 14*l.* per Annum - *English, French, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, History, Geography, Chronology, Rhetoric, Logic, Ethics, Geometry, Physics*; together with Writing in all the useful Hands; *Arithmetic*, Vulgar, Decimal, and Instrumental; *Merchants' Accompts* by Single and Double Entry; *Trigonometry*, Plain and Spherical; *Surveying* and *Mapping of Land*; *Gauging* in all its Parts; *Mensuration* of all Superficies, Solids &c. at much less Expence of Time than usual: Where particular Care is also taken of the Morals of the Children, that they may be train'd up at once to LEARNING and VIRTUE,

By JAMES ROUQUET

(Late of St. *John's* College, OXFORD)

N.B. No Child is received above the Age of twelve Year"[28]

This announcement provides much information that would require much analysis – including the fact that Wesley was aware of the so-called "black air" – i.e., carbon dioxide – was affecting the environment and the educational process. There are other attempts to articulate rationality and spirituality which mark the educational project established by Wesley. One is the resource to the Enlightenment, focusing on the reading, editing, publications, and distribution of books.[29] As evidenced by his library, the donations he made to Kingswood School, and the pedagogical plan he designed for the school, he read the *Works* of Joseph Addison, was surely interested in history and, due to his professional work in the philosophical field, he also had access to the works of

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[28] Cited by G.M. Best, *Wesley and Kingswood [1738-1988, 250th Conversion Anniversary]* (Bridgwater, Bigwood & Staple Ltd, 1988).

[29] On Wesley's editorial work see Ryan, L. *John Wesley and the Education of Children*, 72-76. Earlier research includes Baker, F. "Wesley's Printers and Booksellers" in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Broxton (UK), XXII, (3): 61-65, 1939 e Baker, F. "Wesley's Printers and Booksellers" in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Broxton (UK), XXII, (5): 97-101, 1940. See also Herbert, Th. *John Wesley as Editor and Author* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940).

René Descartes, David Hume, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Voltaire.[30] Another is the inclusion of culture, rhetoric and music. This is clear in the treatises and hymnals collected by Wesley and his brother, Charles Wesley: *The Gamut, Scale of Music* [1761], *The Grounds of Vocal Music* [1765], *Thoughts on the Power of Music* [1779]) and hymn collections, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* [1739], *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* [1753].[31] Yet another is his rhetoric. In his library he had a vast collection that witnesses his knowledge of classic writers: he had volumes of Horace, Caesar, Cicero and Augustine, as well as the masters of the English language: John Dryden, William Shakespeare, Alexander Pope, John Milton and Edward Young.[32] He collected many passages of these texts and elaborated a study on rhetoric, published with the title *Directions Concerning Pronunciation and Gesture* in 1749.[33] In the end, however, these steps lead to a theological perspective, as evidenced by Wesley's *Sermons* and other writings such as *A Treatise on Baptism*, *On Family Religion*, and *On Obedience to Parents*. In a later text, published in 1783 in the *Arminian magazine*, had the title *A Thought on the Matter of Educating Children*.

The emphasis on children and child education seems to occlude the multidimentional views on spirituality and rationality in Wesleyan education. However, all the dimensions are indirectly present in the educational process that later leads to a more robust Methodist education. The question of emotions and spirituality in the Wesleyan movement involves a series of controversial elements to be considered, such as religious enthusiasm, the polemic relation between emotion and eroticism, and other characteristics of popular religious movements in the 18th century.[34] Yet the most important aspect in Wesley which I would like to highlight here is

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[30] MacMillan, K. "John Wesley and the Enlightened Historians," *Methodist History*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (2000), pp. 121-132; Maddox, R. "John Wesley's Reading: Evidence in the Kingswood School Archives," *Methodist History*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (2003), pp. 49-67.

[31] Wesley, J. *Works*, Vol. 7.

[32] See Lawton and his study in three parts on this theme: Lawton, G. "Slang and Colloquialism in John Wesley's Tracts and Treatises" in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Broxton (UK), XXXV (6), 154-158, 1994; Lawton, G. "Slang and Colloquialism in John Wesley's Tracts and Treatises" in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Broxton (UK), XXXV (7): 165-167, 1994; and Lawton, G. "Slang and Colloquialism in John Wesley's Tracts and Treatises" in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Broxton (UK), XXXV (8): 185-188, 1994. See also Shepherd, T.B. *Methodism and the Literature of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Epworth, 1940).

[33] See the analysis of Wesley's texts on rhetoric by Howell, W.S. *18th Century British Logic and Rhetoric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) and also by De Bolla, P. *The Discourse of the Sublime* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1989).

[34] On religious enthusiasm, eroticism and Methodism (e.g. the Love Feasts, etc.) see Rack, Henry *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992); and Swollett, Tobin *Humpry Chinker* [ed. by James L. Thorson] (New York: Norton, 1983). It is also important to see how this leads to Romaticism: Simpson, D. *Romanticism, Naturalism and the Revolt against Theory* and Brantley, R. *Locke, Wesley and the Method of English Romanticism*.

the form in which he tried to establish rules for spirituality, combining a religious dimension with his views on scientific methodology.

This educational project is expanded in terms of spiritual formation, as expressed in Wesley's sermons. In the sermon *The Case of Reason Impartially Considered*, based on I Corinthians 14:20, he started by pointing to the silliness of certain behaviors and their childish character, insisting that one should always pursue a mature understanding: "Brethren, be not children in understanding: in wickedness be ye children; but in understanding be ye men".[35] But he also repeats that one cannot base faith on reason. The same old question arises here again: how can we find a middle term between rationality and spirituality? Again, methodical discipline was the solution proposed by Wesley, including as means to search for spiritual perfection and sanctification. Holiness, according to Wesley, was a type of practice, which needed continuous exercise in order to become strong and coherent, for it does not fall from heaven or occurs solely by inspiration.

3. Plurality and Multiple Dimensions of Wesleyan and Methodist Education

The multidimensional reading of Wesley's thinking allows for nuances, discloses plurality, recognizes tensions, and takes us to a central and final point: rationality and spirituality are in constant contrast, demanding a mediating method that brings various aspects to a balance,[36] without assimilating them. This constant tension can avoid dualisms and help us pay attention to various aspects simultaneously. Holding to only one aspect without recognizing the other is one-dimensional and needs to be avoided.

The brief overview proposed here shows at least five educational dimensions experienced by John Wesley and indicate how these experiences played a role in his own activities as educator: as a tutor in higher education, informal educator of the masses, a child educator, as a person involved in intercultural relations, and as a leader preoccupied with the spiritual and theological formation of the people called Methodists brought together in small societies. In each of these

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[35] Wesley, J. *Works*, Vol. 2, p. 589.
[36] Heitzenrater, R.P. *John Wesley and the Oxford Methodists*, pp. 231-286, 332-408; Harper, S. *A vida devocional na tradição Wesleyana* (São Bernardo do Campo: Edims, 1992); Heitzenrater, R. *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995).

areas, there were successes, but also tensions, failures, and problems. In higher education, for example, Wesley's insistence on rigid procedures created tensions within the University of Oxford and attracted hostile reactions from students, Deans, Chancellors, and the community at large. His administration style at Kingswood created tensions with George Whitefield and his pedagogical method was later criticized as too rigid and authoritarian. His focus on the masses was mocked at the time, characterized as enthusiast or fanatic, and defiant of the church authorities. And his model of theological education was questioned for not being based on a firm theological system, but rather on an eclectic collection borrowed from different religious traditions.[37]

In any case, Wesleyan education has had and can have a positive impact when considered in its multidimensional application. Through the emphasis on education, the stress on rationality, consideration of scientific methods, public political activism, a new economic behavior, and engagement in social justice practices, Wesley was very engaged in the most important public debates of his age while also maintained an eye on the issues that affected the churches. He established a bridge between church and society through education. Even as he emphasized a theological dimension with a focus on Pietist practices, he established rules and methods for spiritual formation which were consistent with the stress
connecting faith and reason.

The spiritual formation component of the Methodist societies, as revealed especially in the Aldersgate experience, is the dimension of Wesley's life which has received most attention in church circles. There is a focus on Wesley's religious practice as a sole personal experience, as the identity crisis of an individual Christian, going from a solitary decision to become a missionary in the Americas in 1736, through the humility of his failure in this endeavor, a lonely search for perfection, and a rigid pious commitment to social action. It is often assumed that these individual aspects led to John Wesley's personal experience on May 24, 1738, and should serve as reference for an individual transformation, a discerning process, and an ongoing effort toward perfecting one's faith.

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[37] Ryan, *John Wesley and the Education of Children*,.

This path can be understood differently, when we consider John Wesley's education as a communitarian and multidimensional endeavor that required not only individual effort, but various other factors such as family investment, institutional services, academic reflections, intercultural relations, and a collective methodology – perfectioned throughout the years – exemplified by a model of collective learning that first placed him in a university setting for scholarly discussions and religious practices, and then placed him at a meeting of a society located at Aldersgate Street in London – by the way, not necessarily in a temple, but in an unidentified place. At each juncture, there were rational and spiritual aspects at play.

This path also reflects an educational process with various aspects. It is based on this perspective that we can observe the hard work involved in preparing Wesley for Aldersgate. This preparation involved his homeschooling, academic training in a prestigious school, missionary internship abroad, intercultural interactions and learning of other languages – including the practice of translating theological texts and hymns from different traditions –,[38] participation and leadership in the Holy Club, involvement in a "small company" of members of the Fetter Lane Society, and practice of engaging in public debate and social action through preaching, writing hymns, publishing on various topics, and establishing schools.

Based on John Wesley's own education, it is not inconceivable to conclude that, Wesleyan and Methodist education, as made evident by the educational ministry of many people, seeks to promote opportunities for people to connect scientific, theological, and practical knowledge in ways that can be applied in professional, social, and spiritual aspects of life.[39] John Wesley did not see spiritual formation, academic study or social action as separated, but rather as part of an educational process. We should note forget that the Wesleyan and Methodist movement was born within a university setting and throughout the years, up to 1750, John Wesley would continue be connected to it and sign as "John Wesley, Fellow of Lincoln College."[40]

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[38] Heitzenrater, R. *John Wesley and the Oxford Methodists, 1725-35*, 332-408.
[39] Schofield, R. "John Wesley and Science in 18th century England," *Isis*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (1953), pp. 331-340; English, J. "John Wesley's Scientific Education," *Methodist History*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (October 1991), pp. 42-51.
[40] Wesley, J. *The Works of John Wesley* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1989), Vol. 1, p. 2.

From Religious Worldviews to a Universal Consensus: Perspectives for a Postsecular Society

DRAFT – In Progress (Do Not Cite Without Permission)

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Abstract

This paper discusses the implications of "religion in a postsecular society" in light of a discourse theory. This goal is pursued in a few steps. First, I insert this topic within a wider interdisciplinary discussion that recognizes a *plurality of religious worldviews*, admits the possibility of an *overlapping consensus* among them, and postulates this consensus as a way to affirm a *universal consensus, from below*. Second, I review Habermas' contribution to this discussion and his articulation of religious and philosophical discourses. Third, I focus on Habermas' recent definition of a "postsecular society" and his proposal for a critical consideration of the "semantic content" of religious discourses in a global public sphere. Based on these steps, I derive two conclusions about how religion and theology, which can contribute to education in postsecular societies: First, it is possible to articulate different understandings of religion with a plural approach to human rights; second, these different understandings need to account for the multiple dimensions of individuality, collectivity, plurality, and universality.

To talk about "religion in a postsecular society" requires us to consider a thematic relationship that had received little attention in *mainline* academia until recently. There are many possible reasons for the previous negligence and the current interest regarding the study of this complex issue, but I would like to mention just a few. First, discussions about these areas were separated according to specific contexts and areas of expertise, indicating the *lack of a more global and interdisciplinary approach* capable of articulating religion, politics, and law in a wider framework. Second, research in these areas was strictly guided by *key modern assumptions that are now being questioned* on various grounds such as the strict separation of church and state, the privatization of religion as a matter of faith, the progressive disappearance of religious culture from the public sphere, the rationalization process as incompatible with religious beliefs, and the secularization of society as an inexorable process. Finally, although religious themes appeared disconnected from contemporary issues and were neglected by mainline academia, *religion began to receive some attention and be addressed more systematically by philosophers* such as John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas, Judith Butler, Charles Taylor, Jacques Derrida, Martha

Nussbaum, Hilary Putnam, and Giorgio Agamben, among many others. Because most of these philosophers had previously upheld the strict separation of church and state and the limited role of religion in the public sphere, now they need to explain not only how their previous positions can be made compatible with their recent turn to the study and analysis of religion, but also how their positions dialogue with the empirical facts and analysis provided in the fields of anthropology, sociology, theology, comparative law, and others.

The recent philosophical interest in religion is not to be interpreted as necessarily confessional, apologetic or psychological – based, for example, on the supposition that philosophers in the Western canon have traditionally turned to religious themes as they mature in age. Rather, they are a response to the "fact of pluralism" and the "reality of globalization." A series of events in the last decades constitute a growing wave that imposed itself upon us. For instance, the election of Jimmy Carter to the presidency of the United States in 1976 and the emergence of an evangelical Moral Majority that supported party politics in the 1980s is just a first example of the social and political impact of religion in modernity, which was contrasted and complemented at the time by the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, an event that triggered a series of attempts at establishing other Islamic states based on *Shari'a* law in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and North Africa. A similar process could be seen in the discrete role of religious movements in the democratization process of East Germany and the Soviet Union around 1989 as well as the emergence of new democratic governments in Latin America in the 1990s which were inspired by liberation theology. Moreover, multicultural societies also made room for the recognition of a variety of religious views linked to minority groups that claimed the right to express their identity and beliefs in the public sphere. It is, therefore, in light of this wider context that we can talk about "religion and theology in a postsecular society."

In view of the expansiveness and complexity of all the facts, processes, motivations, and actors involved in this theme, I approach this subject with fear and tremble, respect and intellectual modesty. Thus, I start with a liturgical attitude, confessing my own situation and reiterating that sentiment once expressed by Max Weber: that despite my being "religiously unmusical" [*religiös unmusikalisch*], I respectfully dare to say something about this sublime topic. Moreover, I spell out my own *locus enuntiationis*, affirming that I am someone whose identity and education has been informed by the Methodist tradition, an ecumenical understanding of Christianity, influenced especially by the Latin American liberation theology,

and later exposed to multiculturalism and its religious expressions. However, I will not discuss religion from an apologetic theological perspective, but rather in light of a comprehensive perspective comprised of two complementary approaches. First, I rely on the sociology of religion to observe a variety of religious experiences as social actions that can be described in their social impact. Secondly, I dialogue with a philosophical tradition represented by Critical Theory, especially Discourse Theory, which establishes a dialogue with sociology of religion as it develops both a Critical Theory of Religion.

Having established the current importance of theme, its polemic implications, its impact on recent philosophical positions, and my own approach to this series of factors, I will now pursue this subject according to three steps. First, I insert this topic within a wider interdisciplinary discussion that recognizes a *plurality of religious worldviews*, admits the possibility of an *overlapping consensus* among them, and postulates this consensus as a way to affirm a consensual *universality*. Second, I review Habermas' contribution to this discussion and his articulation of religious and philosophical discourses. Third, I focus on Habermas' recent definition of a "postsecular society" and his proposal for a critical consideration of the "semantic content" of religious discourses in a global public sphere. Based on these steps, I derive two conclusions about how religion can contribute to cosmopolitanism and human rights in postsecular societies: First, it is possible to articulate different understandings of religion with a plural approach to human rights; second, these different understandings are compatible with contemporary cosmopolitanism, provided that we account for the dimensions of individuality, collectivity, plurality, and universality.

I. A Possible Model of Global Plurality: Philosophy and Religion in the Axial Age

My initial task is to relate the general topic of this conference to a wider interdisciplinary discussion on the compatibility of a *plurality of religious worldviews* with the *universality of human rights*. Before I delve into this topic, I want to step back and take Karl Jaspers' definition of the Axial Age as the starting point of the consideration of this theme. I have at least two reasons for this initiative. First, Jaspers was one of the first in the attempt to perform a "decentering" of Eurocentric views; second, he provides us with an interesting suggestion about the simultaneous development or co-originality of philosophical and religious worldviews.

Despite some of Jaspers' limitations, the concept of axial times has been reassessed today by many authors and has an important role in Jürgen Habermas' conception of cosmopolitanism, human rights, and religion in a postsecular society.

Karl Jaspers began his career by publishing a psychological analysis of "worldviews" [*Weltbilder*] and contrasting them with a philosophical "global intuition" [*Weltanschaaung*]. In his book *Psychology of Global Perspectives* [*Psychologie der Weltanschaaungen*] he defines worldviews as patterns based on particular environments which enable an individual to make sense of objective reality, even under conditions of psychopathology (1919:122). Individuals follow such cultural patterns that formalize their experiences, define what counts as an authentic life, and help them to pursue their existential goals. In contrast, Jaspers conceives of a "global intuition" as something universal, as a philosophically defined comprehensive framework that corresponds to "the highest manifestations of the human being" (1919:1). It is not surprising, therefore, that the first volume of Jaspers' book on philosophy has the subtitle "Philosophical global orientation" [*Philosophie 1: Philosophische Weltorientierung*] (1932). In this book, he concludes that such philosophical comprehensive frameworks orient our global orientation and require both our acknowledgement of the ethical and religious elements at the core of worldviews and the realization that these worldviews are always in communication (1932:392; see Alessiato 2011).

Jaspers' considerations on the worldviews and global perspectives of groups and civilizations are registered in *Origin and Goal of History* [*Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*]. In this book he defines the Axial Age or the axial times [*Achsenzeit*] as "the period around 500 BC, in the spiritual process that occurred between 800 and 200 BC" (1949:1), a time in which "a common framework for the historical self-understanding" of humans evolved. He characterized this as "an age in which the basic categories emerged, based upon which we still define our thinking" (1949:19-20). Also here he highlights the plurality of collective worldviews and a positive relationship between religious and philosophical conceptions. He describes the axial age not necessarily as a moment but rather as a process of moving from myths to a more abstract and speculative process [*Vergeisterung*] that led to the origins of philosophy. Yet, he does not see this process as a necessary development, but rather as a rupture that could be observed simultaneously and independently in several high cultures [*Hochkulturen*] and geographic regions such as Persia, India, China, and Greece. His approach is realist enough to acknowledge

drawbacks in the history of civilizations but at the same time affirm the possibility of an evolution in human rights and solidarity. For instance, he affirms that "one of the preconditions for of humanity is human solidarity, illuminated by natural and human law, continually betrayed and for ever presenting its demands afresh" (1949:43).

Although Karl Jaspers has been characterized today as "a neglected thinker" (Tornhill 2011), his thought on the Axial Age and on the plurality of worldviews has recently gained renewed attention. First, there have been several critiques of his views, including the charge that he simply generalizes an implicit understanding of Christian religion upon other cultures, that he is limited by the Eurocentric perspectives of his times, and that he does not include Africa in his schema of world history (Black 2008). Yet, as Hauke Brunkhorst has stated, despite these criticisms – which are to be taken seriously – we can at least assume that Jaspers's approach has helped to perform a decentering of perspectives that is helpful today. Second, the concept of Axial Age has been reassessed more approvingly in several ways: Shmuel Eisenstadt led a series of initiatives to study the presuppositions and current impact of the axial civilizations and other civilizations in the preaxial times—such as Egypt and Mesopotamia (1986); Samuel Huntington recognized the plurality of civilizations and their role in a multipolar world, even though he concluded that this plurality would lead to a "clash of civilizations" (1996:28, 41–55, 183f.); sociologists have reinterpreted the axial times to make sense of the tensions between secularism and postsecular societies (Bellah and Joas 2012). Finally, Jaspers's philosophy has been used to reflect on the intrinsic plurality of perceptions about *humanity* which influence various conceptions of *human rights*. For Jim Bohman, recent discussions about human rights have given much more emphasis on the meaning of *rights* than to the meaning of *human* because references to human worth, human dignity, and human needs have a religious dimension that is deemed too metaphysical or weak as a justification for the universality of human rights (Bohman 2007:101f., 105). Bohman relies on Jaspers and also on Hannah Arendt to provide an insightful distinction between humanness and humanity and qualify the status of what is "human" in human rights. In this process, he insists that the plurality of worldviews leads to a plurality of political communities – identified as *dêmoi* – which may offer alternative self-understandings of modern democracy and the corresponding variety of legal frameworks (Bohman 2007).

Based on all the above, I conclude that Jaspers' theory can help us set the stage for a discussion about the relationship of "cosmopolitanism, human rights, and religion in a

postsecular society." If he is right, contemporary views on human rights are built upon deep foundations that can be traced back in centuries and millennia, leading us back to the cultures of the axial times, and revealing religious presuppositions to philosophy, politics, and law. Taking these cultures into consideration help us to acknowledge the variety of contemporary worldviews and recognize their plural values. Still, a question remains: Is it possible to arrive to universality based on this affirmation of religious pluralism? Today, this question concerning the plurality of worldviews and their relationship to religion, politics, and law is being affirmed by authors as diverse as John Rawls, Martha Nussbaum, Hans Küng, Jacques Derrida, Abdullahi An-Naim, Charles Taylor, Seyla Benhabib, Jürgen Habermas, and many others. Having taken Karl Jaspers' definition of the axial times as a way to affirm the importance of global plurality, now I want to focus on three specific contemporary authors who propose different ways of arriving to an "overlapping consensus" among global philosophical and religious worldviews. They provide important concepts that help us make sense of the relationship between philosophy and religion in secular and postsecular contexts.

II. Overlapping Consensus: From Plural Worldviews to Universal of Human Rights

Karl Jaspers' definition of the Axial Age offers us an initial of map of global cultures which can be worked out and expanded. Based upon this map we can affirm the simultaneity of philosophical and religious worldviews as well as the importance of global plurality from the beginning. This serves as framework within which we can insert current discussions about "cosmopolitanism, human rights, and religion in a postsecular society." In this section, I attempt to trace how John Rawls, Martha Nussbaum, and Charles Taylor address religious themes in their work and defend the possibility of an *overlapping consensus* among different worldviews.

This step is important for several reasons. First, these authors try to answer the question concerning the possibility of upholding universality amidst the recognition of plurality, including the plurality of religious groups and convictions. Second, they avoid top-down approaches by understanding universality as the result of bottom-up and more democratic "overlapping consensus" that emerges from an intercultural dialogue among different traditions. Third, they reveal in their own writings how religious elements can operate as underlying cultural backgrounds that influence contemporary philosophical positions. Finally, they provide a good

example for the very point I am trying to make because they seem to arrive to an overlapping consensus regarding the possibility of affirming universality, even though they arrive at this similar conclusion through different ways and means.

From the Fact of Pluralism to an Overlapping Consensus

In political philosophy, Rawls has been one of the first to take comprehensive worldviews into account, challenge the role of religious views in politics, but nevertheless propose the possibility of an overlapping consensus about basic values brought forth by such views. Although Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* states that justice should not be considered as a common good given by nature or dispensed by God – as traditional societies believe – but rather as a "way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation" (Rawls 1971: 7), he later provides more room for cultural and religious considerations as well as reflections on how this relates to human rights.

A clear initial movement in this direction can be observed in his article "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical" (1985), where he refers to the Protestant Reformation and the religious wars over conflicting conceptions of the good as a problem whose solution required religious tolerance and a more unbiased political conception of justice. Based on this example he defines justice as fairness and envisions it as the practical agreement among free and equal citizens within a democratic regime, an agreement that requires us to "to avoid disputed philosophical, as well as disputed moral and religious, questions" (1985:230). Accordingly, social cooperation cannot emerge from God's law or from the affirmation of comprehensive moral doctrines, but rather from the impartial perspective of the "original position" in which individuals refrain from expressing their contingencies and worldviews by assuming the "veil of ignorance" (1985:235).

In a second moment, registered in "The idea of an Overlapping Consensus" (1987), we observe a clearer turn to pluralism as Rawls moves beyond this initial proviso and affirms the possibility of a wider agreement among plural worldviews through a process in which "different and even conflicting doctrines affirm the publicly shared basis of political arrangement," even if they accept justice as fairness for different reasons (1985:246, 248-249; 1987:4). Religious views are one example of comprehensive doctrines that can be acceptable if they do not contradict

political expectations of religious tolerance and of the right to individual "liberty of conscience." This accommodation indicates an important step towards the recognition of differences, but as Will Kymlicka argues, in order to search for an unbiased standpoint Rawls provides a somewhat biased account of tolerance that does not account for plural group rights (1992).

These considerations are then expanded and synthesized in *Political Liberalism*, where Rawls continues to reject metaphysics but accommodates the plurality of opposing and incommensurable conceptions by accepting the "fact of reasonable pluralism" (1993:36). Also here he has much to say about religion, especially as he defines moral, philosophical, and religious "background cultures" as comprehensive doctrines with similar standing (1993:37-43). While he continues to insist on the primacy of a political conception of liberalism, he now adds the possibility of accepting such comprehensive doctrines as part of a possible consensus, provided that they are translated into a free-standing political conception of justice compatible with constitutional democratic principles (1993:59). This "overlapping consensus" should not be confused with the despotic *consensus* of Catholic universalism (1993:xxif.) but postulated as a *political* conception of justice that can be accepted by different religious, cultural and philosophical views – under the condition that these views are "reasonable" (1993:36-37). One interesting point is that Rawls comes closer to Jaspers when he distinguishes between "fully comprehensive" and "partially comprehensive" views. He is more concerned with the former and the possibility of translating fully comprehensive claims into constitutional principles. This can be seen, for example, in the case of a religious doctrine that affirms liberal political values such as the principle of toleration and liberty of conscience. Modern society allows for a learning process in which citizens may uphold both the principles of justice recognized in constitutional democracies and other cultural and religious views: "Should an incompatibility later be recognized between the principles of justice and their wider doctrines, then they might very well adjust or revise these doctrines rather than reject those principles" (1993:160). Even though Rawls subsequently provides slight revisions of this requirement, the general point remains roughly the same: "reasonable comprehensive doctrines, religious or non-religious, may be introduced in public political discussion at any time, provided that in due course proper political reasons – and not reasons given solely by comprehensive doctrines – are presented that are sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines are said to support*"* (1997:783).

This understanding has profound implications for Rawls' conception of human rights. In *The Law of Peoples*, where he goes from the national application of political liberalism to its implementation in the international arena – thus being more directly confronted with a much wider plurality of conflicting comprehensive doctrines – he tends to see human rights as an extension or generalization of liberal principles (1999:37). Although he does make room for other political cultures of "decent peoples" in hierarchical societies and acknowledges the plight of "burdened societies," in the end religious views are unimportant for him. On the one hand, he says, "liberal peoples by their constitution have no religion – they are not confessional states – even if their citizens are highly religious, individually or together" (1999:24, 47); on the other, he even adds that "the fact that women's status is often founded on religion, or bear a close relation to religious views, is not in itself a cause of their subjection, since other causes are usually present" (1999:110). This is surely a controversial point, among many others he affirms in *The Law of Peoples*, which are criticized by several authors.

Let us focus on the issue of religion and secularization. The point that religious views can be taken into account only if they are translated into the acceptable language of political liberalism may be valid as a description of particular regions in contemporary United States – such as New England or the Northwest. This cannot be generalized, much less globally. One may ask: Are there cases in which political principles are adapted in order to accommodate religious views? Also in the United States we find many examples of this practice, as shown by Robert Bellah in his analysis of "civil religion" (1967). Rawls could counter-argue that he is not proposing a description but rather a normative framework, a proposal on how society should be. Still, my point is that this normative ideal emerges historically from a particular comprehensive view whose roots can be identified with specific religious views regarding individuality which are indebted to European Protestantism and this conception of individuality and eventually became enshrined in a constitution. Therefore, one may characterize a kind of "constitutional privilege" of Protestantism in the United States, despite all the efforts of the Founding Fathers to frame the Constitution from a more impartial point of view. Let me expand on this point: If Christianity has a constitutional privilege in the constitutions of Western democracies, this is not much different from incorporating *shari'a* law into constitutions of Islamic countries or upholding Confucian values as core to the political system in China. This may explain why there are various examples of legal cases, court decisions, and political practices in the United States

that implicitly and explicitly reiterate mainstream Protestantism as the norm from which minority religions or non-religious individuals and groups deviate, although the American Constitution promotes the free exercise of religious freedom and the separation of church and state as impartial measures.

I am not necessarily questioning individuality, but rather affirming that the value of individuality cannot be taken for granted. If this religious infiltration into legal and political language seems unavoidable, then it may be better to be open and upfront about it, submitting these contingencies to public scrutiny as well. In fact, today we can see that there are clear religious presuppositions to many of Rawls' concepts. With the posthumous publication of his undergraduate thesis at Princeton University, much light has been shed on his religious views as well as the implicit worldview guiding his philosophy. From today's perspective, it is possible to trace his views on justice and morality to his senior thesis, *A Brief Inquiry into the Meaning of Sin and Faith: An Interpretation Based on the Concept of Community* (2009). This text was subject to analysis in an introduction by Thomas Nagel and by other authors who reveal the likely religious roots of his deontological approach and his emphasis on basic individual rights (Gregory 2007; Habermas 2012:257–276). However, an important point in his views at this early stage of his thinking is the definition of an ethical standpoint based on the Christian doctrine of love. This means that Rawls relies on a comprehensive doctrine to establish the interdependence between individual and community and criticize an egotistical "bargain-contract society" that uses other people as means and creates a state of fear and distrust (Rawls 2009:110–113, 229). Based on this assumption, Rawls affirms the importance of a religious community and states clearly that "Christian morality is morality in community, whether it be the earthly community or the heavenly community [. . .] This fact means that man can never escape community, and therefore is always responsible and always under obligations" (Rawls 2009:122).

This conclusion appears to be in radical contrast with the framework Rawls established in *A Theory of Justice* (1971) and *Political Liberalism* (1993) because in previous works he questions metaphysical assumptions, upholds the separation of church and state, and replaces the religious premises of the Golden Rule with a principle of fairness. Yet, as Thomas Nagel recognizes, there is a common thread in all these proposals, which is the search for a comprehensive outlook about the social world which can also be interpreted in their relation to religious terms (Nagel, in Rawls 2009:5). For instance, Rawls' earlier views on the absolute

value of the individual and the universal-egalitarian ethical obligations promoted through the Christian religion (Habermas 2012:57) are presented in *A Theory of Justice* by using the corresponding concepts of "person" and "society." Instead of having God as the instance for societal stability, this role is shifted to the institutions of a democratic and well-ordered society.

What can we learn from this? Although the subtle changes observed above, from *A Brief Inquiry into the Meaning of Sin and Faith* through *A Theory of Justice* to *Political Liberalism* can be interpreted as a learning process and a progressive translation of religious categories into impartial political concepts, the fact that Rawls later makes room for comprehensive views actually puts him back on track and offers an important insight regarding postsecular societies. There is actually a coherent line in his works, which indicates a possible compatibility between religious worldviews and the views of a secularized liberal state. What we need are better global criteria to evaluate the issues at stake. A possible overlapping consensus on the universality of human rights can serve as reference for this task.

Religious Diversity and the Consensus around a Constitutional Framework

From a legal perspective, Martha Nussbaum brings more compelling arguments for the possibility of being upfront about religious issues, accommodating these issues into the legal framework of a liberal society, and promoting plurality and human rights beyond national limits. Although she criticizes Rawls views on human rights, especially because he uses a limiting "language of rights" and allows for discriminations against women when he accepts the legitimacy of decent nonliberal peoples in the hypothetical land of Kazanistan (Nussbaum 2006), she agrees with Rawls' definition of justice as fairness and his proposal for an overlapping consensus. Moreover, instead of going around the issue of religion, as Rawls seemed to have done in his approach to this subject, she addresses the relationship between politics, religion, and law head on, focusing on religious equality and the right to freedom of conscience as conditions for a fair multicultural society (2008:62). She thus addresses important points that seem to be missing in political liberalism and complement her own previous writings by explicitly addressing questions of religious identity and convictions.

First, in her writings on human rights, Nussbaum questions the limits of the liberal discourses emphasizing "rights" and insists on the need to highlight the human dimension at play

in global human rights, including the role of emotions, the dimension of sexuality, and the acceptance of disabilities (Nussbaum 2000, 2004b). Moreover, she questions whether only impartial individuals have rights and adds groups and particular gendered identities into the discussion. She starts with the assumption that humans are not necessarily equal (2001a:212–213), but have differences that need to be recognized and compensated in certain situations, so that individuals and groups such as women, peoples with disability, and ethnic or religious minorities may be able to pursue their full potential as humans (2001b:97–98), claiming rights to life, bodily health, senses and imagination, emotions and friendship, and play and control over one's environment (2001b:98–101). Because the liberal language of rights is limited and fails to address these issues, Nussbaum develops her "capabilities approach" (2001b).

Second, Nussbaum also expands human rights by relating it more directly to cosmopolitanism, which prompts her to question patriotism and criticize the limited scope of a national constitutional framework (1996). As Nussbaum has reminded us, one of the earliest and most important references to human rights is the cosmopolitanism of Diogenes of Sinope, who was one of the first to express the idea of being a citizen of the cosmos while bound by local contingencies (Nussbaum 1997). According to this view, humans are citizens of two communities: "The local community of our birth and the community of human argument and aspiration" (Nussbaum 1997:29). It is in light of these premises that we can understand how Nussbaum performs a turn to religion similar to Rawls', but with an even greater commitment to pluralism and group identity.

Finally, in her book *Liberty of Conscience: In Defense of America's Tradition of Religious Equality* (2008), Nusbaum expands the framework once more. She starts by explicitly affirming her identity as a Christian who later converted to Judaism and as a scholar who studies India and is familiar with the struggle of Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim immigrants to the United States (2003:9-39; 2008:14). Based on the evidence that these religious minorities suffer discrimination and are targeted with extra burden when their convictions clash with the existing legal framework influenced by the Protestant culture in the United States, Nussbaum upholds the American tradition of "liberty of conscience" since the works of Roger Williams in the 17th century (2008:19-20, 51-58). Also here she needs to come to terms with political liberalism. For instance, she challenges a strict separation between church and state because this would lead to a situation of profound unfairness and promote an unfounded aversion to or marginalization of

certain religious expressions (2008:11). Her argument, therefore, is that an implicit constitutional privilege contradicts the principles of justice proposed by Rawls. In her interpretation, the separation of church and state should be a device to protect minority religions and avoid that groups such as evangelical Christianity affirm their ideology as the state religion in the United States.

After historical considerations that lead to an analysis of how religious liberty was framed in the Constitution of the United States, Nussbaum discusses the needs of religious minorities – such as Quakers, Mennonites, Jews, and Amish, Mormons, Muslims and Jehova Witnesses –, especially when their beliefs conflict with the government requirements such as military service, revelation of private confessions, and the observation of particular holidays (2008:116-130). There are many cases involving conflicts between religious minorities and constitutional clauses aiming at accommodating differences, but constitutional processes have a tendency to penalize those who cannot articulate their claims well because they are foreigners, immigrants or minorities who do not master the "language of rights." These groups do not have the privilege of having their worldviews projected onto the Constitution. Moreover, initiatives such as the "Pledge of Allegiance" (2008:199-214) and educational policies that impose a particular evangelical culture in public institutions, especially in the area of education, disrespect the culture of minority groups and contradict the liberal precept of liberty of conscience (2008:224ff.).

What would be the difference to highlight between Nussbaum and Rawls? In the end, Nussbaum reaffirms the primacy of political liberalism and its commitment to uphold fairness (2008:172-173), but she attempts to make it more compatible with en explicit commitment to religious equality. She sides with Rawls and accepts the idea of an "overlapping consensus" because "citizens themselves will rarely separate their understanding of the political conception from the comprehensive doctrine they love" (2008:362). Also, she considers this turn compatible with her previous work, not only because "liberty of conscience" has its background in Stoic philosophy and cosmopolitanism (2008:76-84), but also because there is a legal tradition in American culture that shows an ongoing process of more than 400 years to guarantee freedom of religion. Precisely due to this legacy, citizens need to be vigilant and avoid that this process be undermined by changing political circumstances. Nussbaum is careful enough to add a proviso that her focus on American culture is not an exercise in patriotism, but rather a celebration of the

depth and ethical value of American constitutional tradition (2008:32). Yet, it is fair to say that she stops short of providing a model to promote an overlapping consensus beyond this particular context. Moreover, she does not account for cases of legal pluralism in which the precepts of different constitutional frameworks clash and require a higher instance to address such intercultural conflicts. This shortcoming gives me the opportunity to introduce Charles Taylor and review his conception of multicultural and intercultural plurality as well as his postulate of a possible universal consensus involving Western and non-Western cultures. This brings us back to the points developed earlier by Karl Jaspers.

The Secular Age, Multiculturalism, and the Intercultural Consensus

Charles Taylor not only establishes a clearer dialogue with Karls Jaspers' idea of Axial Age, but also criticizes Rawls' liberalism and expands some of the points brought up by Martha Nussbaum regarding religious identity. Differently from them, however, he clearly affirms his hermeneutical conditionings from the beginning, controversially stating his identity as a practicing Catholic in a multicultural society as Canada. He affirmed his position early enough, in his debates on Marxism and secularization (Taylor 1958, 1960), and then radicalized confessional tone in later writings (2007). Taylor raises provocative and controversial apologetic claims in relation to Latin Christianity, but his position has the merit of identifying hidden religious premises in accepted social developments, presenting challenges to secularism and secularization theories, and proposing the concept of "immanent frame" as the wider "context in which we develop our beliefs" (2007:549).

A first important point to reiterate is that Taylor is never shy of the deep religious roots that inform his motivations. He presents them by means of philosophical arguments indebted to the hermeneutic tradition that goes from the so-called three H's—Johann G. Hamann, Johann G. Herder, and Wilhelm von Humboldt – to the theories of meaning in Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Gadamer (Taylor 1985a). These philosophers provide him with a tool to question the overly individualistic and instrumental views of modernity in political liberalism, which occlude the anthropological conditionings of the self, forget how individual agency and identity depend on the particular language and culture of a localized historical experience, and lead to a loss of meaning, cultural expressivity, and freedom (Taylor 1991:1-12, 25-30). This leads to his

differences with Rawls. Because Rawls' liberalism is the political heir of these modern views, he is the constant target of Taylor's critique: He questions liberal "atomism," rejects ethical subjectivism, and opposes the primacy of individualistic rights over collective conceptions of the good (1985b:187-209; 1995:181-202). Moreover, he takes the concepts of freedom and "recognition" [*Anerkennung*] from Hegel to develop a proposal for identity politics and group rights (Taylor 1975; Taylor and Gutman 1992).

Second, this leads to both his proximity and difference in relation to Nussbaum's position. With his proposal for group rights, Taylor's conception of communitarian plurality is not limited to a given tradition but expanded into both *multiculturalism* and *interculturalism*, a move inspired by the particular case of Québec and the constitutional debates for a multicultural Canada in the 1960s, which he connects to other facts and events in Europe (Taylor and Gutman 1992; 2012). He does agree with the importance of equality. For him, "equal recognition is not just the appropriate mode for a healthy democratic society. Its refusal can inflict damage on those who are denied it" (Taylor and Gutman 1992:36). However, he does not think impartiality is the answer. Rather, the antidote to inequality is a "politics of difference" that recognizes distinctions, opposes assimilation, and creates affirmative policies to avoid or rectify oppression (1992:58). In this regard, Taylor and Nussbaum seem to agree, but Taylor goes a bit farther.

Third, Taylor affirms that "some of the reasons that make interculturalism right for Quebec apply also to some European countries" (2012:422) and amplifies his communitarianism to the international level. For sure, Taylor is still bound to a North Atlantic context that cannot be generalized. Intercultural dialogue is not simply internal to the Canadian society or the North American context, with interesting parallels in Europe. Nevertheless, he does mention the Turkish guest workers [*Gastarbeiterinnen*] in Germany who want to be integrated in terms of citizenship but also want to maintain their cultural and religious identity. He also advances a discussion about an intercultural "consensus on human rights" (1999:124-144). In his view, the recognition of different cultural, religious, and philosophical worldviews has become available for renewed interpretation, appropriation, and renewal. By making sense of the intercultural interaction among different communities and cultures, he envisions the acceptance and implementation of human rights in non-Western societies that have denounced human rights as a Western imposition. The acceptance of the universality of human rights requires, however, an appropriate philosophical justification that recognizes the particular historical and cultural context in which

human rights are being applied (1999). This can be done, according to Taylor, if we differentiate the legal understanding of human rights in liberalism from the deeper philosophical worldviews that underlie distinct legal frameworks. As we have seen, this question leads invariably to a discussion about religious worldviews.

Finally, all these elements are brought together in his account of religion and the secular age. *A Secular Age* begins by viewing secularity in way that encompasses the various forms of secularism and secularization implicitly mentioned by Rawls and Nussbaum. Taylor defines them as follows: "secularity 1" corresponds to the privatization of religion, "secularity 2" is the decline of religious practice in general, and "secularity 3" is the recognition that religious beliefs can be challenged and, therefore, needs to be justified in relation to the "whole context of understanding in which our moral, spiritual, or religious experience and search takes place" (2007:2-3). Due to his own hermeneutical conditioning, Taylor concentrates on his own culture as an example, attempting to reveal the underlying foundations of his own thinking. The search for underlying worldviews has taken various forms in Taylor's work. One example is his research on the sources of the "Self" in modern Europe, in which he reveals a particular conception of the human being that places higher value on individuality and defines society in terms of a contractual agreement among individuals who are endowed with rights (1989), but at the same time he recognizes that the goal of having an individual as the subject of rights and of establishing the foundations of society on mutual cooperation and a legal order has been achieved in other societies by other means (Taylor 1999:134). Another example is his narrative about the "secular age," in which he shows the evolution of worldviews as "social imaginary," reveals a "disembedding" process through which a particular Protestant conception of individuality influences society in such a way that "society itself comes to be reconceived as made up of individuals" (2007:146), and . Also here, he criticizes Rawls and political liberalism for not recognizing their own particular religious worldview and the fact that other cultures have other contingencies. Nevertheless, Taylor agrees with Rawls' proposal for an overlapping consensus as a means to affirm the universality ethics, democracy, and human rights (2007:532). This consensus requires, however, that we acknowledge "the immanent frame," which is the conditional "sensed context in which we develop our beliefs" (2007:13). For Taylor, the very idea of a secular age is the result of a religious development that we should not neglect.

Despite the impressive breadth of his philosophical interests and the scope of his considerations on the secular age, many criticisms can be brought against Charles Taylor. For instance, many see his views as apologetic. Moreover, his historical reading of Latin Christendom appears selective (Butler 2010:193f.). Also, he fails to account for the colonial component in his historical narrative, not realizing that what he cherishes as "Latin Christendom" is the result of the encounter with heterogeneous cultures (Mahmood 2010:285). This brings us back to the beginning of my discussion about the plurality of worldviews and the possibility of affirming their universality, provided that we avoid these types of biases by recognizing global plurality from the beginning. This is what we can learn when we compare these ideas with Karl Jaspers' decentered model of co-original philosophies and religious during the axial times. In fact, Taylor explicitly refers to the Axial Revolution to question the primacy of individual rights and affirm that "perhaps the most fundamental novelty of all is the revisionary stance towards the human good in Axial religions" (2007:152). This assertion cannot be made *en passant*, but needs to be affirmed from the beginning, so that we maintain plurality as a critical condition for a legitimate overlapping consensus.

Politics, Law, and Religion in relation to Secularism

Going from Rawls through Nussbaum to Taylor, we can have a glimpse of various arguments for the recognition of a *plurality of religious worldviews* and the concomitant assumption of a possible "overlapping consensus" among different traditions that could accept the *universality of some basic values*. Based on their positions, this consensus is only possible if human rights are not simply limited to the language of rights and if political and legal frameworks make room for the expression of fully comprehensive views – including religious worldviews. There are obvious challenges involved in maintaining both aspects together: if human rights are limited to a liberal conception of individual rights, then group identities and collective concerns may not received appropriate attention; conversely, if emphasis is given to group rights and communitarian structures, individual autonomy may be limited. It makes sense, therefore, to have an heuristic that requires us to have both dimensions simultaneously.

While Rawls tends more towards individuality and has progressively opened his views to the dimension of collectivity – including the expression of religious views –, his conception of

human rights appears more as a projection of the particular national framework of a liberal society upon the international area. Nussbaum makes a more decisive move towards both the recognition of individual capabilities and group rights – especially minorities with their respective religious views – while upholding the universality of an ethical and cosmopolitan position as the standard upon which individuals and groups are to be judged. Taylor criticizes the liberal emphasis on individualism but goes further in affirming the plurality of multicultural and intercultural interactions. Although he is less emphatic in his endorsing of universality, he does provide a model of recognition of otherness that has the potential to be applied globally. It is easy to see that these positions have different strengths, specific gaps, and a certain complementarity because, taken altogether, they provide different reasons to support individual autonomy, collective recognition, multicultural and intercultural dialogue, and a possible consensus on the meaning of universality. Moreover, at each juncture we find a specific understanding of religion connected to these various levels. Thus, religion can be understood as private individual faith based on freedom of conscience, collective identity based on shared beliefs, intercultural interactions based tolerance for differences, and ethical values – justified differently by various worldviews – that can claim universality if they are the result of an overlapping consensus.

Taken alone, neither of these positions can cover all of these points. Nevertheless, I believe it is possible to advance some of his ideas and articulate these various dimensions and relate them to discussions on human rights at the global level while respecting distinctive ways of understanding human rights in different cultures. In the end, they all affirm the possibility of an overlapping consensus regarding human rights which would also include non-western societies, provided that the involved parts offer appropriate philosophical justifications that recognize multiculturalism and are compatible with the historical or cultural context in which human rights are being applied. Thus, in the same ways as the development of modernity in Europe required an appropriation of Judeo-Christian values, basic human rights can be justified from within particular cultures that possess the potential to agree on fundamental values that can be shared across cultures. This brings us back to the framework I established at the beginning with the help of Karl Jaspers. For example, the ancient thinking of Confucius in China or the pre-Socratics in Greece was definitely metaphysical, but implied some notions of humanity and rights and duties that underlie contemporary positions. Modern European philosophy was

influenced by both a Christian conception of humanity and a scientific and secularized naturalism that defined rights in a more individualistic fashion. How can we explore this perspective without falling into the problems of particularism and relativism that contradict universality? In my view, we need a wider framework that updates the points we retrieved from Jaspers' consideration of the Axial Age and integrates the contributions we have from the different philosophers I discussed above.

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