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# John Wesley and engaged aesthetics: transformative Christian education

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Dissertation

**JOHN WESLEY AND ENGAGED AESTHETICS:  
TRANSFORMATIVE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**

by

**FRANCISCA FERDINANDA IRELAND-VERWOERD**

B.S., Akademie Diedenoort, 1983  
M.Div, Nazarene Theological Seminary, 1998

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

2018



Approved by

First Reader

---

Bryan P. Stone, Ph.D.  
Professor of Evangelism  
Associate Dean of Academic Affairs

Second Reader

---

Mary Elizabeth Moore, Ph.D.  
Professor of Theology and Education  
Dean of the School of Theology

I have wanted all my life to be a teacher;  
Yet here I am teaching and fretting  
That I am not up to the task—  
Not smart enough,  
Not charismatic enough,  
Not articulate enough,  
Not at all wise.

And yet, I have to teach—  
You and I have experiences of God that are meant to be shared;  
I know ideas and practices that I want you to know,  
And visions of hope that I want you to see;  
I can glimpse gifts in you that I want to encourage,  
And sense the deep inner knowing that is yours to explore;  
I know the possibility that we can face the world together,  
    Know it together,  
        Act in it for better,  
            And celebrate the wisdom of ages past  
            And ages to come!

Mary Elizabeth Moore

Do not imagine that Art is something which is designed to give gentle uplift and self-confidence. Art is not a *brassière*. At least, not in the English sense. But do not forget that *brassière* is the French for life-jacket.

Julian Barnes

All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read symbol do so at their peril. It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.

Oscar Wilde

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to all ministers, Sunday School teachers,  
small group leaders, and mentors;  
thank you for your investments in the edification of the Church.

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And lastly, I am deeply grateful to the One who called me to go on this adventure and saw me through. *Gloria in excelsis Deo.*

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**FRANCISCA F. IRELAND-VERWOERD**

Boston University School/College of Theology, 2018

Major Professor: Bryan P. Stone, Professor of Evangelism

**ABSTRACT**

The Church of the Nazarene has an identity problem. Increasingly, Nazarenes are unfamiliar with their denomination's holiness theology, and a gap exists between what people say they believe—espoused theology—and what they practice—operant theology. I argue that aesthetic Christian education can play a significant role in decreasing the discrepancies between a person's beliefs and practices. This kind of teaching and learning incorporates holistic aesthetic elements, which I call engaged aesthetics. Research in the neuroscience of visual perception seems to point to the possibilities that art can offer for transformative reflection. Christian education that features the viewing of art can explore these opportunities to reflect on faith-as-beliefs and faith-actions and to amend discrepancies at a personal and/or communal level. Since the Church of the Nazarene is grounded in John Wesley's theology, I make the case for an aesthetic educational bridge between espoused and operant theology rooted in the engaged aesthetic of Wesley's practical theology, and in affinity with Wesley's experiential and affective epistemology.

## TABLE OF CONTENT

CHAPTER 1: THE CONGRUENCE GAP .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Church of the Nazarene .....	2
The Holiness Gap .....	3
Christian Education in the Church of the Nazarene.....	6
Personal and Interpersonal Transformation .....	7
Why John Wesley? .....	9
Practical Theological Methodology .....	10
A Short History of Practical Theology .....	10
Contemporary Practical Theology .....	13
A Practical Theological Roadmap .....	15
Espoused Theology and Operant Theology .....	16
Practice-laden Beliefs and Belief-laden Practices .....	17
Education for Holiness of Heart and Life .....	18
Education and Theology .....	20
Engaged Aesthetics .....	21
Toward a Multifaceted Theological Aesthetic .....	22
Wesley and Aesthetics .....	23
In the Wesleyan Spirit .....	24
Theological Aesthetic Reflection and the Hospitality of Art .....	27

Aesthetic Christian Education: Personal and Communal .....	29
Wesleyan Aesthetic Christian Education .....	30
CHAPTER 2: WESLEY'S PRACTICAL THEOLOGY .....	33
Introduction .....	33
Wesley's Theology: Pragmatic, Pastoral, or Practical? .....	33
Wesley's Espoused Theology: Practice-laden Beliefs .....	37
A Plain Account of Christian Perfection .....	38
The Sermon on the Mount .....	41
Summary .....	45
Wesley's Operant Theology: Belief-laden Practices .....	45
Wesley and Medicine .....	46
Wesley and Money .....	53
Practice-laden Beliefs and Belief-laden Practices .....	60
CHAPTER 3: WESLEY'S AESTHETIC PRACTICAL THEOLOGY .....	62
What is aesthetics? .....	62
Contemporary Theological Aesthetics .....	64
Theological Aesthetics .....	66
Wesley's Theological Aesthetics .....	67
Engaged (Theological) Aesthetics .....	75
Embodiment .....	75

Form-giving .....	77
Foregrounding .....	81
Paying Attention .....	83
Holding in Tension .....	91
Wesley and Engaged Aesthetics .....	94
Wesley and Embodiment .....	95
Wesley and Form-giving .....	97
Wesley and Foregrounding .....	103
Wesley and Paying Attention .....	108
Wesley and Holding in Tension .....	113
Wesley's Aesthetic Practical Theology .....	117
CHAPTER 4: AESTHETIC EPISTEMOLOGY .....	119
Introduction .....	119
Aesthetic Knowing .....	120
Development in Aesthetic Knowing .....	125
Difficult Transitions .....	127
Learning through Questions .....	128
Pedagogical Goals .....	131
Art and Neuroscience .....	131
The Importance of Metaphor .....	131
A Closer Look at Meaning-Making .....	133

Ambiguity and the Ineffable .....	136
Empathy and Imitation .....	138
The Role of Attentiveness .....	139
Cognitive Neuroscience and Engaged Aesthetics .....	140
Cognitive Neuroscience and Aesthetic Epistemology .....	142
Maximizing the Commonality of Aesthetic and Religious Experience .....	144
The Hospitality of Art .....	144
Wesley’s Epistemology .....	146
Background .....	146
Wesley and Edwards .....	147
Natural and Spiritual Senses .....	148
Conclusion .....	152
CHAPTER 5: WESLEYAN AESTHETIC CHRISTIAN EDUCATION .....	154
Introduction .....	154
Transformative Learning Theory .....	155
Art Education .....	159
Aesthetic Religious Education .....	160
The Holy Spirit and the Aesthetic .....	164
Wesleyan Aesthetic Christian Education .....	165
Limitations of Engaged Aesthetic Christian Education .....	171
Aesthetic Christian Education Scripts .....	175

The Neuroscience of Art Viewing Scripts .....	175
Slowing Down .....	176
Lines, Contrasts, and Edges .....	177
Body Parts .....	178
Emotions .....	180
Rewards .....	181
Two Example Scripts .....	183
Conclusion .....	184
APPENDIX A .....	186
Example Script 1: <i>Flight into Egypt</i> .....	186
Viewing Script #1 .....	190
Unpacking the Engaged Aesthetic .....	193
Example Script 2: <i>Abraham</i> .....	196
Viewing Script #2 .....	197
Unpacking the Engaged Aesthetic .....	200
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	202
CURRICULUM VITAE .....	219

## CHAPTER 1

### THE CONGRUENCE GAP

#### Introduction

The Church of the Nazarene has an identity problem. Increasingly, Nazarenes are unfamiliar with holiness theology, and a gap exists between what people say they believe and what they practice. This dissertation proposes one particular way to address the congruence gap, through aesthetic Christian education.

Lack of correspondence between faith pronouncements and actions calls for a practical theological approach because practical theology is concerned with the reciprocity of beliefs and practices: “Rooted in Christian tradition, practical theology focuses on a called people who manifest a particular faith through concrete ways of life.”<sup>1</sup> The solution to the congruence gap lies in an educational approach of reflecting on the manifestation of the believers’ faith and ways of life. I will argue that education can play a significant role in decreasing the discrepancies between a person’s beliefs and practices, particularly the kind of teaching and learning that incorporates holistic aesthetic elements.

Aesthetic Christian education, and especially Christian education through the viewing of art, provides opportunities to reflect on the inexorable connection of faith-as-beliefs and faith-in-actions, and to discern and strengthen this mutual interdependence at a personal and/or communal level. Here, art viewing is guided by a script that integrates

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<sup>1</sup> Kathleen A. Cahalan and James R. Nieman, “Mapping the Field of Practical Theology,” in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids, MI, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 67.

what I call *engaged aesthetic* features, i.e. qualities that indicate the involvement of the whole person in the shaping of meaning.<sup>2</sup> Art viewing activates specific neurological pathways of meaning-making as the process triggers ideas, memories, feelings, and past experiences. Consequently, this kind of aesthetic education can offer a hospitable place for spiritual reflection that leads to transformation in daily life.

Since the Church of the Nazarene is grounded in John Wesley's theology, I will make the case for an aesthetic educational bridge between stated beliefs and practices against the background of Wesley's aesthetic practical theology, and in affinity with Wesley's experiential and affective epistemology.

In this chapter I will clarify the various elements of the argument, beginning with the identity problem faced by the Church of the Nazarene. After presenting the case that the incongruence is a practical theological problem, I will offer a short history of practical theology in order to situate this study in that discipline, explaining the terms used. Finally, I will argue for an educational solution to the problem of incongruence, specifying the components of engaged aesthetics.

### **Church of the Nazarene**

The Church of the Nazarene, first begun in 1895 in Los Angeles and then later established in 1908 as a merger of several groups, is one of the fruits of the American

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<sup>2</sup> Aesthetics is the philosophical study of beauty and the sublime; it also pertains to theories of art, and it involves a third connotation, namely of meaning-making. See, for instance, João Pedro Fróis and Boyd White, "Words for Artworks: The Aesthetics of Meaning Making," *The International Journal of Art & Design Education* 32, no. 1 (February 2013): 109–25; Olivia Gude, "Aesthetics Making Meaning," *Studies in Art Education* 50, no. 1 (2008): 98-103.

Holiness Movement. It has seen itself as commissioned by God to “preserve and propagate Christian holiness as set forth in the Scriptures, through the conversion of sinners, the reclamation of backsliders, and the entire sanctification of believers.”<sup>3</sup>

Historically, as holiness groups inside and outside the USA joined the Church of the Nazarene, the church has encompassed various interpretations of and emphases within its holiness theology. This has been possible by maintaining a definition of holiness that permits a wide application:

We believe that entire sanctification is that act of God, subsequent to regeneration, by which believers are made free from original sin, or depravity, and brought into a state of entire devotement to God, and the holy obedience of love made perfect. . . . This experience is also known by various terms representing its different phases, such as “Christian perfection,” “perfect love,” “heart purity,” “the baptism with or infilling of the Holy Spirit,” “the fullness of the blessing,” and “Christian holiness.”<sup>4</sup>

This description of holiness has remained remarkably similar over the years.

### The Holiness Gap

A significant shift in the understanding of holiness took place about fifty years ago, when Nazarene theology veered away from entire sanctification as the “eradication”

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<sup>3</sup> Church of the Nazarene, General Assembly, “Articles of Faith, 10,” *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene 2017-2021* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 2017) [hereafter *Manual XX-YY*], accessed February 14, 2018, [http://2017.manual.nazarene.org/?\\_ga=2.137695159.6221548.1518535466-1863875049.1513457884](http://2017.manual.nazarene.org/?_ga=2.137695159.6221548.1518535466-1863875049.1513457884).

<sup>4</sup> *Manual 2013-2017*, 32-33. The first *Manual* [1908] says: “Entire sanctification is that act of God, subsequent to justification, by which regenerate believers are made free from inbred sin, and brought into the state of entire devotement to God, and the holy obedience of love made perfect.” See Hardy C. Powers, *Manual Church of the Nazarene 1908-1958: Then-Now Comparisons and Comments* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1958), 47. Mark Quanstrom gives an overview of the changes in theological language and meaning and he compares the Article of Faith on (Entire) Sanctification as articulated in *Manuals* from 1907 to 2001 in “Appendix 1,” *A Century of Holiness Theology: The Doctrine of Entire Sanctification and the Church of the Nazarene 1905-2004* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2004), 194-95.

of the sinful nature of human beings.<sup>5</sup> In the nineteenth century, the classic model of the Wesleyan Holiness Movement emphasized original sin as an “evil principle” within each person that could only be “eradicated” through baptism with the Holy Spirit (also called “entire sanctification,” or “Christian perfection”), which happens instantaneously.

In the mid-twentieth century, however, and especially after the publication of Mildred Bangs Wynkoop’s book *A Theology of Love* in 1972, many Nazarene theologians began emphasizing holiness theology as a relational theology, suggesting that entire sanctification is a gradual process of growth.<sup>67</sup> The practices formerly inspired by traditional nineteenth century holiness theology have mostly been abandoned as old-fashioned, legalistic, and irrelevant, with little focus on new and contemporary approaches to the formation of practices that connect the various forms of twenty-first century holiness theology to daily life.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Quanstrom, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1972). These two sentences are a simplification of the complexity of the changes in understanding of holiness theology from Wesley to the present. See also Randy L. Maddox, “Reconnecting the Means to the End: A Wesleyan Prescription for the Holiness Movement,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33, no. 2 (Fall 1998): 29-66. Wynkoop acknowledged the existence of the “credibility gap” between the *doctrine* of holiness and everyday human life: “The absoluteness of holiness theology may satisfy the mind but the imperfection of the human self seems to deny all that the perfection of Christian doctrine affirms (39). She proposed a relations approach of the theology of love to bridge the gap between what Cameron et al. called *formal* theology and espoused theology. That is an important issue, but not within the purview of this dissertation.

<sup>7</sup> Wynkoop, 39-40.

<sup>8</sup> In the early to mid-twentieth century, holiness expressed in certain practices (e.g. no alcohol, no worldly entertainment) became a conservative subculture to preserve the denomination’s identity. See, for example, Ronald R. Emptage, “Denominational Identity in Historical Perspective,” Church of the Nazarene, accessed February 9, 2017, <http://nazarene.org/files/docs/Denominational%20Identity%20in%20Historical%20Perspective.pdf>, 5. Again, this is a stark simplification of a complex historical, sociological and theological context.

Several recent studies have raised the concern that, in various ways, the Wesleyan-Holiness theology of the Church of the Nazarene is not adequately passed on to ensure that members can actually grow in(to) the experience of holiness of heart and life.<sup>9</sup> Members of the Church of the Nazarene are increasingly unfamiliar with holiness theology.<sup>10</sup> The loss of holiness emphasis in theology and in practices can be attributed to many factors: theological challenges, such as the influence of fundamentalism and evangelicalism; social challenges, such as secularization, a consumer mentality, the influence of digital culture, erosion of generational influence, and the movement from "sect" to "denomination"; and practical challenges, such as the denominational use of conservative evangelical religious education material, and the neglect to pass along the holiness heritage to the next generation.<sup>11</sup> The weakening of the holiness distinction and the variety of interpretations of holiness theology have had their effect on expressions of

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<sup>9</sup> Dean G. Blevins, "John Wesley and the Means of Grace: An Approach to Christian Religious Education" (PhD diss., School of Theology at Claremont, 1999); John Kenneth Bondy, "A Correlational Analysis of the Elementary Curriculum of the Church of the Nazarene and Its Core Values: Based on Faith Connections Curriculum for Children" (PhD diss., Hoseo University, 2005); Dirk R. Ellis, "The Relationship between Liturgical Practice and Spirituality in the Church of the Nazarene with Special Reference to John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection" (PhD diss., Andrews University, MI, 2012); Mark A. Maddix, "Reflecting John Wesley's Theology and Educational Perspective: Comparing Nazarene Pastors, Christian Educators, and Professors of Christian Education" (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2001); Todd A. Stepp, "Scriptural and Rational Piety: The Development and Use of a Curriculum for Teaching Authentic Wesleyan Worship" (DMin thesis, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2007); Cheryl S. Thomas, "An Examination of Systemic Gaps in the Preparation of Sunday School Teachers in the Church of the Nazarene" (PhD diss., University of Colorado at Denver, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Philip N. LaFountain, "Narratives of Holiness Identity: The 'Sanctified Person' in the Church of the Nazarene" (ThD diss., Boston University School of Theology, 2010), 182-83; Blevins, 6-19; Maddix, 14-15, 213-15. LaFountain found six different ways in which Nazarenes identified with the doctrine and experience of holiness. He concluded that "holiness, in its variegated forms and expressions is still an aspect of Nazarene identity, if not always a highly salient aspect" (182).

<sup>11</sup> LaFountain, 21, 42-43; Blevins, "John Wesley and the Means of Grace," 6-19; Maddix, 13-14; and Bondy, 6-11.

holy living. It is no longer clear how holiness is expressed in daily life. Without the practices of former generations, Nazarenes need to re-contextualize holiness theology to incorporate practices that convey holiness in and to today's world.

### Christian Education in the Church of the Nazarene

The need for a more holistic approach to Christian education in the Church of the Nazarene has been raised by four recent studies, conducted separately.<sup>12</sup> Dean Blevins, Mark Maddix, John Bondy, and Philip LaFountain all came to the conclusion that a change is needed in the formative processes within the local congregations in order for transformation toward holiness to take place. These studies have concentrated on the need to give renewed attention to education in the church. In his 1999 dissertation, Blevins articulated the problem as follows: "The Church of the Nazarene ... has not produced a significant, comprehensive text on Christian religious education in over twenty years. Denominational leaders instead have relied on the broader, more conservative, American evangelical tradition in the same twenty-year period."<sup>13</sup>

Two years later, Maddix pointed out the same lack of attention to formation towards holiness, and he investigated "the relationship of John Wesley's theology and educational perspective with the educational perspective of Nazarene pastors, Christian

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<sup>12</sup> Blevins, "Means of Grace"; Bondy, "A Correlational Analysis"; LaFountain, "Narratives of Holiness Identity"; Maddix, "Reflecting John Wesley's Theology."

<sup>13</sup> Blevins, 2-3.

educators and professors of Christian Education.”<sup>14</sup> In 2005, Bondy compared the then newly published *Core Values* of the Church of the Nazarene to the curriculum for children.<sup>15</sup> He found fundamental inconsistencies, which, if not amended, would put “the church as currently known with its holiness heritage and emphasis ... at risk.”<sup>16</sup>

In 2010, LaFountain studied the social context of holiness identity and practices in three churches; using narratives of religious identity, he identified six variants of holiness. LaFountain approached the discrepancy between identity and practices positively: “The so-called identity crisis, which the Church of the Nazarene appears to be experiencing, is a perfect opportunity for the Church of the Nazarene to reconsider its holiness identity, and to do so in light of the demands of the Gospel *and* the experience and practice of contemporary Nazarenes.”<sup>17</sup>

### Personal and Interpersonal Transformation

LaFountain emphasized the ecclesial and ethical nature of holiness identity: “One is made holy so that one can live ethically. ... Christlikeness then is through and through a religious relation and ethical process. If holiness is understood as ethical process,

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<sup>14</sup> Maddix, 8. In 2010 Blevins and Maddix published *Discovering Discipleship: Dynamics of Christian Education* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2010), the one and only book on religious education since the last volume on religious education in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition was published thirty-two years ago, *Exploring Christian Education* by A. Elwood Sanner and A.F. Harper (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1978).

<sup>15</sup> Church of the Nazarene, “Core Values of the Church of the Nazarene,” Appendix A, accessed March 31, 2016, <http://nazarene.org/core-values>.

<sup>16</sup> Bondy, iv.

<sup>17</sup> LaFountain, 21.

attention can shift to the conditions that promote ethical formation. Ecclesial holiness confirms the primacy of the *ecclesia* as the locus of such transformation.”<sup>18</sup> Blevins, too, located the transformative process within the church as he explored Wesley’s emphasis on the means of grace (works of piety and works of mercy) in education, proposing that “the complementary approaches of formation, discernment and transformation” express Wesley’s desire that his people would experience a transformative holiness of heart and mind. However, as Maddix has shown, embracing Wesley’s theology does not necessarily mean that Wesley’s educational practices are translated into contemporary education:

The distinct aspects of John Wesley’s theology and educational perspective were embedded in his view of sacramental theology, means of grace and small group formation. It is these educational practices that provide a distinctive Wesleyan approach to education. . . . Pastors and Christian educators [who participated in Maddix’ study] agreed with Wesley’s theology, *but they did not see the relationship of their theology to their educational practices*.<sup>19</sup>

The aggregate conclusions of these studies show the need for an approach to Christian religious education within the Church of the Nazarene in the context of the *ecclesia*. At the same time, the authors invite further consideration of how that approach is to take shape. Notably absent in the aforementioned studies, as well as the literature on Christian education in the Church of the Nazarene, is a specific *pedagogy* that makes room for transformation; a “space” of prayerful and critical reflection on experience, emotions, memories and concepts, where human willingness, endeavor and

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<sup>18</sup> LaFountain, 330.

<sup>19</sup> Maddix, 238 (emphasis mine).

accountability meet the power and love of God to transform lives. This dissertation offers a personal and interpersonal transformational approach to Christian education, compatible with Wesley's theology and practices while integrating contemporary pedagogical theories.

### Why John Wesley?

Many early Nazarenes saw themselves as the heirs of Wesley and as “the resurrection of the Methodist Church in the true Wesleyan holiness spirit.”<sup>20</sup> Several decades later, however, it became clear that the understanding of holiness and its nurture in the Holiness Movement were considerably different from John Wesley.<sup>21</sup> Following Zondervan's 1958 republication of *The Works of John Wesley* (Jackson's edition of 1829-1831), Albert Outler's 1964 critical primer *John Wesley*, and the formation of the Wesleyan Theological Society in 1965, calls mounted for “the recovery of Wesley's richer network of means for Christian holiness nurture.”<sup>22</sup> In that same spirit, I propose to look at Wesley's practical theology in order to bridge the credibility gap between holiness beliefs and holiness practices in the Church of the Nazarene. Since Wesley's theology was the catalyst for the Holiness Movement and the Church of the Nazarene,

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<sup>20</sup> Emptage, 4.

<sup>21</sup> John L. Peters was one of the first to address this issue in his book *Christian Perfection and American Methodism* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956); see especially chapter 5, “The Doctrine Modified, 1865-1900” (133-80).

<sup>22</sup> Randy L. Maddox, “Reconnecting the Means to the End: A Wesleyan Prescription for the Holiness Movement,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33, no. 2 (Fall 1998): 31. See also Quanstrom, 128-34.

this dissertation seeks to go back to the source. Wesley's strong connection between what he said he believed and how he expressed his beliefs in practices can provide a new basis for Nazarenes to bring faith-as-beliefs and faith-in-actions closer together. Wesley's practical theology can clarify and nurture the "call unto holiness" for Nazarenes today.<sup>23</sup>

### **Practical Theological Methodology**

#### A Short History of Practical Theology<sup>24</sup>

The term practical theology, or practical divinity, is strongly related to the history of theology as academic study. Before the rise of Western universities, all theology, embedded as it was in the Judeo-Christian interrelated understanding of knowing and doing, was considered "practical theology."<sup>25</sup> In the thirteenth century, the institutionalizing of theology gave rise to the bifurcation of theoretical theology as speculative or systematic theology within the academy, and practical theology as Christian spirituality outside the university.<sup>26</sup> By the late sixteen hundreds, practical theology was back in the university as a course of theology for pastors, simplified from

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<sup>23</sup> Lelia N. Morris's hymn "Called Unto Holiness" (1900) is the rallying cry of the Church of the Nazarene.

<sup>24</sup> In this brief overview I present broad trends; local emphases and practices varied.

<sup>25</sup> Randy L. Maddox, "Practical Theology: A Discipline in Search of a Definition," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 159; Duncan B. Forrester, "Can Theology Be Practical?" in *Practical Theology – International Perspectives*, ed. Friedrich Schweitzer and Johannes van der Ven (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999), 17-28.

<sup>26</sup> Maddox, "Practical Theology," 160; Friedrich Schweitzer, "Continental Europe," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 467.

the rigorous advanced theology.<sup>27</sup> In the following century, the academic discipline of practical theology signified the study of Christian actions, as opposed to speculative or theoretical theology which studied Christian beliefs.<sup>28</sup> Subsequently, since practical theology also formulated norms for Christian practice, it became a form of moral theology, eventually including subjects such as church polity and pastoral activities.<sup>29</sup> A further specialization took place when the German universities considered practical theology to refer especially to the activities of the church.<sup>30</sup> In the eighteenth century, the terms practical theology and pastoral theology both had broad and narrow meanings; practical theology referred to the study of Christian practice broadly and to church practice narrowly, while pastoral theology referred to church practice broadly and to pastoral care narrowly.<sup>31</sup>

Most recent historians of practical theology trace the beginning of contemporary

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<sup>27</sup> E.g. the *Theologiae Practicae Compendium* of Johannes Molanus in 1585. See Randy L. Maddox, "The Recovery of Practical Theology," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 656. On the history of practical theology, see also Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains: Manual for Practical Theology, Studies in Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), and Dietrich Rössler, *Grundriss der praktischen Theologie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986).

<sup>28</sup> Maddox, "Practical Theology," 160.

<sup>29</sup> Maddox, "Practical Theology," 160; Edward Farley, "Interpreting Situations: An Inquiry into the Nature of Practical Theology," in *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology*, ed. Lewis Mudge and James Poling (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 2-3.

<sup>30</sup> See Thomas Albert Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) for an interesting discussion of the influence of social/state pressures at the end of eighteenth century on the content of theological education in German universities; how that influenced Schleiermacher; and how German universities became the standard for universities all over the world.

<sup>31</sup> Farley, 3. As Friedrich Schweitzer pointed out, "practical theology tended to be a Protestant endeavor while Catholics preferred pastoral theology. ... In Europe today, however, practical theology has become the term used most often in Protestantism as well as in Catholicism," see Schweitzer, 467.

practical theology to Friedrich Schleiermacher, who divided theology into three fields: philosophical theology, historical theology and practical theology.<sup>32</sup> In his *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology* (1811), Schleiermacher described practical theology as follows: “Practical Theology ... is for those only in whom *an interest in the welfare of the Church, and a scientific spirit, exist in combination.*”<sup>33</sup> Thereafter, the subject narrowed even further “from ecclesial praxis ... to the praxis of clergy.”<sup>34</sup>

In the mid-twentieth century, Steward Hiltner first challenged the notion that practical theology was restricted to the pastoral context.<sup>35</sup> By the 1980s, scholars “agreed almost universally that previous eras, dating back to Schleiermacher in the nineteenth century, had defined the field too narrowly. ‘Clerical paradigm’ became the code term for this problem.”<sup>36</sup> Since that time, the field of practical theology has developed to include numerous interests, such as social and political theory, theories of knowledge, correlation, human life as theological ‘text’, the nature of ‘praxis’, and the intersection with social sciences and with ‘local theologies’, as well as new ways of studying

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<sup>32</sup> E.g. Gijsbert D. J. Dingemans, “Practical Theology in the Academy: A Contemporary Overview,” *The Journal of Religion* 76, no 1 (January 1996): 82; Maddox, “Practical Theology,” 160-61; Heitink, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1850), 187, §258 (emphasis original).

<sup>34</sup> Maddox, “Practical Theology,” 160-61.

<sup>35</sup> See Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “Introduction: The Contributions of Practical Theology,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 1.

<sup>36</sup> Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “The ‘Clerical Paradigm’: A Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness?” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 11, no. 1 (June 2007): 21.

religious communities.<sup>37</sup> The growing proliferation of methodologies, audiences, goals and conversation partners has some scholars despair of the lack of unity in the field, while others see its diversity as a strength.<sup>38</sup> Bonnie Miller McLemore expressed it best when she concluded that “the sheer difficulty” of defining practical theology “underscores its complex and extended responsibilities.”<sup>39</sup>

### Contemporary Practical Theology

Although it is fair to say that there is no consensus about the definition of practical theology, some common threads can be discerned. Practical theology examines in one way or another, practices that concern people’s relationship to the sacred, in correlation with the texts of (religious) traditions, and the tradition’s or culture’s belief structures.<sup>40</sup> Practical theology is characterized by its interdisciplinary or intra-

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<sup>37</sup> Miller-McLemore, “Introduction,” 1-3.

<sup>38</sup> See, for instance, R. Ruard Ganzevoort, “Forks in the Road when Tracing the Sacred: Practical Theology as Hermeneutics of Lived Religion,” presidential address, International Academy of Practical Theology, Chicago, IL, March 8, 2009, accessed August 25, 2015, [http://www.ruardganzevoort.nl/pdf/2009\\_Presidential.pdf](http://www.ruardganzevoort.nl/pdf/2009_Presidential.pdf); Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “Five Misunderstandings about Practical Theology,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 16, no. 1 (2012): 7-9; Jaco S. Dreyer, “Practical Theology and Intradisciplinary Diversity: A Response to Miller-McLemore’s Five Misunderstandings about Practical Theology,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 16, no. 1 (2012): 34-54; Mary Elizabeth Moore, “Practical Theology: Bound by a Common Center or Thin Thread?” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 10, no. 2 (2007): 163-67; Friedrich Schweitzer, “Practical Theology, Contemporary Culture and the Social Sciences – Interdisciplinary Relationships and the Unity of Practical Theology as a Discipline” in *Practical Theology – International Perspectives*, ed. Friedrich Schweitzer and Johannes van der Ven (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999), 307-21.

<sup>39</sup> Miller-McLemore, “Five Misunderstandings,” 19.

<sup>40</sup> Ganzevoort.

disciplinary dialogue.<sup>41</sup> The intersection between theory and practice is usually studied through an approach that relates “the interpreted theory and praxis of the Christian faith with the interpreted theory and praxis of the contemporary situation.”<sup>42</sup> A common feature of practical theology is the special attention to the construction of meaning and knowledge, either as object of the research (“how do people construct meaning or knowledge out of this practice?”) or outcome of the research (“this is the meaning or knowledge constructed by the studied practice.”)<sup>43</sup> Another common thread is the normativity in or behind the praxis studied, anchoring the research as a theological endeavor.<sup>44</sup>

Beyond these commonalities, it is possible to describe characteristics of the different ways in which scholars are working within the field. Using the analogy of “forks in the road,” Ruard Ganzevoort sums up four areas where scholar diverge in the

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<sup>41</sup> Moore, “Practical Theology,” 165; Dreyer, “Intradisciplinary Diversity,” 51-54; Johannes A. van der Ven, “An Empirical Approach in Practical Theology,” in *Practical Theology – International Perspectives*, ed. Friedrich Schweitzer and Johannes van der Ven (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999), 326-30.

<sup>42</sup> David Tracy, “Foundations of Practical Theology,” in *Practical Theology*, ed. Don Browning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 76.

<sup>43</sup> Tracy, “Foundations,” 76. See also Maddox, “Practical Theology,” 165, and Miller-McLemore, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>44</sup> Dingemans, 95; Don Browning identified five levels of normativity in “practical reason,” see Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 5-6. See also James E. Loder, “Normativity and Context in Practical Theology” in *Practical Theology – International Perspectives*, ed. Friedrich Schweitzer and Johannes van der Ven (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999), 359-81. Normativity is implicitly or explicitly based on Christian traditions, although some are calling for a more inclusive, interfaith approach. See, for instance, Tom Beaudoin, “Questioning ‘Christian-Centrism’,” a section of “Why Does Practice Matter Theologically,” in *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, ed. Joyce Ann Mercer and Bonnie Miller-McLemore (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 12-13.

discipline.<sup>45</sup> Practical theological studies differ in *the subject and location of research*. This can be the ordained ministry of the pastor, the church as it functions in society, faith as “the subjectivized and individualized shape of religion,” or religion as human beings’ interrelation with the sacred, and/or culture.<sup>46</sup> Practical theological studies also vary in *the method of research*. The emphasis may be on praxis as the empirical object, praxis as the source for the construction of theology, a practice studied in order to transform it, a practice of a group of practitioners or a religious tradition studied, usually in order to support a practice. Furthermore, *the role of the researcher* can be as different as participant in a spiritual discipline, enabler in a transformative discipline, evaluator in a critical discipline, or commentator in a descriptive discipline. Finally, *the audience* can differ from ministry formation for the church, to public theology for society, to empirical research for academia.

### A Practical Theological Roadmap

The “roadmap” to situate this dissertation looks as follows: the *subject* of the study is how people in the Wesleyan tradition can more faithfully give shape to their beliefs in daily life. The *location* of this project is the church—as the site of Christian education, whether physically in the church building, or at any place where Christians meet together—as well as in society, where beliefs are expressed in all aspects of life.

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<sup>45</sup> Ganzevoort.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. Ganzevoort borrowed the term from Wolf-Eckart Failing and Hans-Günther Heimbrock, *Gelebte Religion Wahrnehmen. Lebenswelt – Alltagskultur – Religionspraxis* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1998). Maddox describes the five concentric circles as follows: pastoral ministry, life of the church, life of the church in the world, religious/moral life in the world, and human spiritual/existential experience. See Maddox, “Practical Theology,” 162-65.

The *method* of research consists of literature study of Wesley's written work and ministry to establish his practical theology; theological aesthetics to construct an engaged theological aesthetic; and aesthetic epistemology, art education, and Christian education to create an aesthetic Christian pedagogy. Christian education is the practice under scrutiny, and I propose a new approach to that praxis that corresponds to Wesley's practical theology. Although practical theological studies often include fieldwork on a certain practice and may also include recommendations for a renewal of that practice, this dissertation will be confined to laying a theoretical foundation for the renewal of the practice of Christian education, with two illustrative examples. The interdisciplinary component of my research, so characteristic for practical theology, is present in every step of the argument as I engage with the fields of Wesley studies, Wesleyan theology, theological aesthetics, epistemology, the neuroscience of perception, and aesthetic (Christian) education.

My *role* as researcher in this study is that of someone who offers a new reading of Wesley's beliefs and praxis in light of aesthetics and practical theology, with special attention to the practice of Christian education. Out of that flows the role of enabler in a transformative discipline, inviting people to a Wesleyan aesthetic pedagogy that leads to more holy and holistic living. I am also a participant in the praxis of Christian education; my experience of teaching with art led me to appreciate the possibilities of an aesthetic pedagogy. The intended *audience* consists of Wesleyan professors teaching Christian education in seminary, and Wesleyan pastors and lay teachers practicing Christian education in their congregations.

### **Espoused Theology and Operant Theology**

Helen Cameron et al. have named “four voices of theology”: “normative theology (Scriptures, the creeds, official church teachings)”, “formal theology (the theology of theologians)”, “espoused theology (the theology embedded within a group’s articulation of its beliefs)”, and “operant theology (the theology embedded within the actual practices of a group).”<sup>47</sup> These four expressions of theology are distinct, but ideally overlap and interconnect. In lived reality, the voices may represent ways of articulating and enacting faith that are not necessarily clear and well connected.<sup>48</sup>

Cameron and her colleagues developed the concept of the four voices of theology in conjunction with the particular practical theological approach of Theological Action Research. I, however, focus on the language of espoused and operant theology as a shorthand for the two modes of theology under scrutiny. Espoused theology is then the theology of the beliefs articulated by people, and operant theology is the theology present in people’s daily life: in rituals, in family, work, leisure, and entertainment activities, and in habits.

### **Practice-laden Beliefs and Beliefs-laden Practices**

My area of concern is the correspondence—or lack thereof—between the interpreted theology and praxis of the Christian faith. The meaning of practices is carried

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<sup>47</sup> Helen Cameron et al., *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 54.

<sup>48</sup> On the lack of congruence between believers’ stated faith and enacted faith, see Mark Chaves, “Rain Dances in the Dry Season: Overcoming the Religious Congruency Fallacy,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49, no. 1 (2010):1–14.

by the theories “behind them and within them;” they are “theory-laden practices.”<sup>49</sup> At the same time, theories are associated with certain practices; they are therefore praxis-laden theories. The theology of a lived faith, however, demands the unity of theory and practice, stated beliefs and faith-in-action, in such a way that it would be inaccurate to separate the two into “theology-laden practices” and “practice-laden theology” Rather, for the purposes of this study, I will use the term “practice-laden beliefs” and “beliefs-laden practices.” Practice-laden beliefs then corresponds with espoused theology, and beliefs-laden practice with operant theology.

The study of espoused and operant theology carries within itself an ambiguity. On the one hand, espoused and operant theology are inextricably connected: consciously and unconsciously, people act upon and out of their beliefs, and their actions inform their beliefs. On the other hand, espoused and operant theology may or may not correspond; the connection can range from greatly overlapping to incongruent. In other words, the faith of believers should be an inexorable unity of beliefs and actions, so if these beliefs and actions are not sufficiently related, reflecting on them and reconnecting them better becomes imperative. For any person or group, the practices carried within the expressed beliefs may not be the same practices that are embodied in reality. Likewise, the beliefs expressed through actual practices may not be the same as the stated beliefs. The goal of my proposed aesthetic Christian education is to lessen the ambiguity: to facilitate bringing practices and beliefs closer together, so that espoused and operant theology are more congruent.

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<sup>49</sup> See Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 6.

### **Education for Holiness of Heart and Life**

Underneath the challenges of preserving and propagating holiness in the twenty-first century lies a problem that is both theological and pedagogical. While Nazarenes believe that holiness means loving God with one's whole heart, soul, mind and strength,<sup>50</sup> they have not integrated practices that express and develop holiness in all areas of life. The incongruity of beliefs and practices creates identity confusion. I agree with LaFountain, who has argued that in order to recover the meaning of holiness, the Church of the Nazarene must offer a "narrative that will include *both beliefs and embodied practices* that enable the person to participate in his or her own construction of holiness identity, but also to develop deeply embedded habits that shape and guide religious action."<sup>51</sup> However, people do not simply *think* their way into changed actions, but rather "theory and practice 'dialectically' influence each other."<sup>52</sup> Professions of holiness and practices of holy living need to be compatible and in dialogue in order to enhance the process of sanctification, i.e. transformation toward holiness. Only when "holiness of life" is intentionally taught and exemplified as the expression of "holiness of heart," will Nazarene people, congregations and the denomination as a whole have a strong understanding and an incarnated practice of what it means to be sanctified.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See "The Covenant of Christian Character," in *Manual 2013-2017*, 38.

<sup>51</sup> LaFountain, 273 (emphasis mine).

<sup>52</sup> Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Practical Theology and Pedagogy," in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 176. Edward Farley addressed the myth of "the primary mode of theology is think-ing" in "Four Pedagogical Mistakes: A *Mea Culpa*," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 8, no. 4 (2005): 202.

<sup>53</sup> "Holiness of heart and life" was Wesley's favorite expression of the goal of sanctification.

Several practices could be, and should be, utilized to address any lack in understanding and embodiment of faith, such as preaching, literature, education of children and youth, mentoring, and ministry opportunities. However, I take the connecting of people's stated beliefs with what they actually do as the task of transformative education. The goal is to help believers reflect holistically—encompassing mind, body and soul—on beliefs and embodied practices, and the potential discrepancies, in such a way that they can imagine and live into alternative, gap-bridging scenarios, and move towards more congruent, deeply embedded habits. Aesthetic Christian education will help people to consider what kind of actions should accompany their stated beliefs: “If I really believe *this*, then I should do *that*.” Similarly, people can consider that their actions may contain a theology they *really* believe, rather than what they *say* their beliefs are, and need to adjust—either beliefs or actions—accordingly. In addition to this kind of reflection, education that transforms needs to go hand-in-hand with adequate and appropriate formal teaching to address any lack in discursive knowledge of holiness theology.

### Education and Theology

The strong connection between education and theology has been argued by multiple theologians and religious educators.<sup>54</sup> In Christian education, theology is not

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<sup>54</sup> E.g. Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Teaching from the Heart: Theology and Educational Method* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991); Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Teaching as Sacramental Act* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004); Boyung Lee, *Transforming Congregations through Community: Faith Formation from the Seminary to the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013); Jack L. Seymour, *Theological Approaches to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990); Robert W. Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education: An Introduction in Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988); Linda J. Vogel, *Teaching and Learning in Communities of Faith:*

only the content or the basis of the teaching. Rather, theology and education are “partner[s] in dialogue”: in an organic way, theology informs reflection on all the dimensions of life, with hope “for a more holistic vision of education.”<sup>55</sup> The Christian education proposed in this dissertation is informed by the aesthetic characteristics of Wesley’s practical theology. The reflection advocated here is an aesthetic theological contemplation able to promote holistic education; people process what they believe while they engage ideas, emotions, memories, and life experience. Engaged aesthetic reflection subconsciously and inescapably connects rational concepts to the affections and past experience of actions. It provides a means to explore and shift to action patterns that become more in line with deeply held beliefs. This, I argue, is a promising path to the heart of the matter: transformed people who pursue holiness of heart and life.

### **Engaged aesthetics**

This dissertation argues that the interrelation of Wesley’s theology and work yields an aesthetic practical theological framework for Christian education that can foster holy and holistic living. The strong connection in the life and work of John Wesley between what he said he believed and what he practiced, can become a resource for addressing the contemporary problem of holiness identity in the Church of the Nazarene. The answer lies in the *aesthetic* connection between Wesley’s espoused and operant theology.

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*Empowering Adults through Religious Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999); Margaret Ann Crain, *Educating Christians: The Intersection of Meaning* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993); Charles R. Foster, *Educating Congregations: The Future of Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994).

<sup>55</sup> Moore, *Teaching from the Heart*, xvi, 2, 4.

This raises two issues: first, no clarity and agreement exist about the nature of aesthetics in theology; second, Wesleyan theologians have argued for various perspectives of the aesthetic in Wesleyan theology, in the absence of a clear aesthetic theology in the work of John Wesley himself. I address the first issue by reviewing the wide-ranging literature and developing the concept of *engaged aesthetics* which encompasses five connotations that are usually invoked separately in theological aesthetics. I address the second issue by locating Wesley's theological aesthetic in the interplay between Wesley's proclaimed belief in holiness and his embodied, holistic practices of lived holiness.

#### Towards a Multifaceted Theological Aesthetics<sup>56</sup>

In this dissertation, the term *engaged aesthetics* encompasses five connotations that are usually invoked separately in the literature on theological aesthetics: embodiment, form-giving, foregrounding, paying attention, and holding in tension. In conversation with James K. A. Smith, aesthetics includes *embodiment* as a way of knowing through the body.<sup>57</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar brings the aspect of *form-giving* to aesthetics.<sup>58</sup> The Latino-American theologians Alejandro García-Rivera and Roberto

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<sup>56</sup> I use the term (engaged) aesthetics to mean theological (engaged) aesthetics, except in the paragraphs on the history of the philosophical study of aesthetics in chapter 3.

<sup>57</sup> James K. A. Smith, "Part I: Incarnate Significance: The Body as Background," in *Imagining the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 29-100.

<sup>58</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Introduction," in *Seeing the Form*, vol. 1 of *The Glory of the Lord* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 17-126.

Goizueta call attention to disregarded people in the aesthetic move of *foregrounding*.<sup>59</sup> The aesthetic aspects of *paying attention* and *holding in tension* emanate from the work of Frank Burch Brown, Barbara Dee Bennett Baumgarten, John Dewey, and Philip Yenawine.<sup>60</sup> I will argue that Wesley's practical theology exhibits all five aesthetic elements and can therefore be called an aesthetic practical theology. The five elements of engaged aesthetic will be presented in more detail in chapter 3.

### Wesley and Aesthetics<sup>61</sup>

Wesleyan theologians have argued for various perspectives on the aesthetic in Wesleyan theology, in the absence of an aesthetic theology in the work of John Wesley himself.<sup>62</sup> Such a foundation is not possible, according to Kenton Stiles, because of the

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<sup>59</sup> Alejandro García-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful: A Theological Aesthetics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 155-96; Roberto S. Goizueta, *Christ Our Companion: Toward a Theological Aesthetics of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 44-84, 109-25.

<sup>60</sup> Frank Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics: A Theological Study of Making and Meaning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 77-135; Barbara Dee Bennett Baumgarten, "Part I: Making and Viewing Art and the Epistemology of Michael Polanyi," in *Visual Art as Theology* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1995), 1-148; John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 60-84; Philip Yenawine, *Visual Thinking Strategies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2013), 15-38.

<sup>61</sup> Part of this chapter was submitted for the directed study "Wesley's Aesthetics," Spring 2013.

<sup>62</sup> E.g. Timothy Gaines, who emphasizes the beauty of redemption in "A Christian Aesthetics of Justice: Toward the Reversal of Our Own Tragic Flaw," *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 8, no. 1 (2008), accessed April 15, 2013, <http://didache.nazarene.org/index.php/volume-8-1/753-8-1-gains-aesthetics-of-justice-didache/file>; Julia Frances Roat-Abla focuses on the recovery of the *imago Dei* in "Beauty and Holiness: Wesleyan Theology as the Context and Principle for Aesthetic Insight" (MA Thesis, Nazarene Theological Seminary, 2004); Hank Spaulding relates aesthetic to the language of entire sanctification, see "'Be ye holy as I am holy': The Implications of Wesleyan Theological Aesthetics for Entire Sanctification Language," (MDiv paper, Duke University, n.d.); Henry W. Spaulding locates aesthetics in the Trinity: "Beauty, Poesis, and Vision: The Future of Holiness Theology," *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 7, no. 1 (2007), accessed April 15, 2013, <http://didache.nazarene.org/index.php/volume-7-1/69-7-1-spaulding/file>; Kenton Stiles emphasizes holiness as *shalom* in "In the Beauty of Holiness: Wesleyan Theology, Worship and the Aesthetic," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32, no. 2. (1997): 194-217, and as a theology of

inconsistency of Wesley's occasional aesthetic comments and the tension between Wesley's aesthetic admiration and his evangelistic priorities.<sup>63</sup> Peter Forsaith, who made an extensive study of the complexity of Wesley's aesthetic taste, comments that Wesley's appreciation was ambivalent and disjointed—not unlike the social, cultural and political context of his time.<sup>64</sup>

However, by considering not one aspect of aesthetics, as most aesthetic theologians do, but five aspects, I can address Wesley's practical theology more comprehensively. I will demonstrate that, in the strong correlation between Wesley's written theology and the theology he lived out in ministry and life, one finds an engaged aesthetics at work. From this aesthetic perspective, an intricate and more holistic practical theology can be expressed.

### In the Wesleyan Spirit

One of Wesley's strong emphases in ministry was the edification of “the people called Methodist,” or, in contemporary terms, Christian education. As Sondra Higgins Matthaei states, “Each member of a Methodist society received instruction in the faith

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hospitality in “Theological Aesthetics: A Wesleyan Sampling of Cuisine,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 42, no. 1 (2004): 106-82.

<sup>63</sup> Stiles, “In the Beauty of Holiness,” 199-200; Roat-Abla follows Stiles' argument, 3-4. In an unpublished article, “Enslaved to Sense, to Pleasure Prone’: A Study of John Wesley's Theological Aesthetics,” Stiles sets out to build a comprehensive approach based on Wesley's own observations in the *Journals* and his aesthetic insights in three essays, “Thoughts on the Power of Music” (1779), “Thoughts on Taste” (1780), and “Thoughts on Genius” (1778) and in the sermon “God's Approbation of His Works” (1782).

<sup>64</sup> Peter S. Forsaith, “‘Of pictures I do not pretend to be a judge’: John Wesley and art,” in *Image, Identity, and John Wesley: A Study in Portraiture* (London: Routledge, 2018), 83-90.

and nurture for holy living in a system whose purpose was behavioral change, spiritual growth, personal interaction, and community transformation.”<sup>65</sup> In an effort to emulate Wesley, studies have been done and new directions have been proposed for contemporary education in the Wesleyan spirit.<sup>66</sup> Within the wider Wesleyan community, many scholars have documented Wesley’s emphasis on education and made his methodologies applicable to contemporary religious education.<sup>67</sup> The work that has been done so far in Wesleyan Christian education already identifies embodied practices, but does not fully

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<sup>65</sup> Matthaiei, *Making Disciples*, 131.

<sup>66</sup> E.g. Dean G. Blevins, “Faithful Discipleship: A Conjoined Catechesis of Truth and Love,” in *Considering the Great Commission: Evangelism and Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit*, ed. W. Stephen Gunter and Elaine Robinson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005); Blevins and Maddix, *Discovering Discipleship*; D. Michael Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley’s Class Meeting* (Nappanee, IN: Francis Asbury Press, 1997); Mark A. Maddix, “John Wesley’s Formative Experiences: Foundations for his Educational Ministry Perspectives,” *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 9, no. 1 (June, 2009); Sondra Higgins Matthaiei, *Faith in Formation: The Congregational Ministry of Making Disciples* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008); Sondra Higgins Matthaiei, *Making Disciples: Faith Formation in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000); John Prince, *Wesley and Religious Education* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1926); David L. Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002); Kevin M. Watson, *A Blueprint for Discipleship: Wesley’s General Rules as a Guide for Christian Living* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2009).

<sup>67</sup> E.g. Dean G. Blevins, “Renovating Christian Education in the 21st Century: A Wesleyan Contribution,” *Christian Education Journal* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 6–29; Barry Page Drum, “The Wesleyan Way: John Wesley’s Understanding of Christian Discipline” (EdD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011); Gayle Carlton Felton, “John Wesley and the Teaching Ministry: Ramifications for Teaching Education in the Church Today,” *Religious Education* 92, no. 1 (1997): 92–106; Elaine Karen Friedrich Hall, “Pedagogical and Andragogical Principles of John Wesley’s Anthology” (PhD diss., University of North Texas, 1998); David Michael Henderson, “John Wesley’s Instructional Groups” (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1980); Diane Leclerc and Mark Amos Maddix, “Wesleyan Integration: A Distinctive Philosophy of Education,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 45, no. 2 (September 2010): 125–35; Matthaiei, *Making Disciples*; Matthaiei, *Faith in Formation*; John Dale Miller, “Discipleship with Wesleyan Roots: A Spiritual Retreat for Adults” (DMin thesis, Drew University, 1993); Steven Kayne Pulliam, “Wesleyan Discipleship Group: Wesleyan Discipleship as a Catalyst for Equipping Servants” (DMin thesis, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2011); Wesley Tracy, “Christian Education in the Wesleyan Mode,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 30–53; Victor Brady Willis, “Spiritual Growth of Small Group Participants Using a Wesley-Development Model” (DMin thesis, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2001).

embrace or explicitly name multiple forms of knowing and intelligence.<sup>68</sup> Some of the aforementioned studies recommend a recovery of John Wesley's educational practices, especially the aspects of formation, discernment, and transformation through attending to the means of grace and the role of formative relationships through the structure of the classes and bands.<sup>69</sup> However, what is still lacking is a pedagogy that is commensurate with Wesley's aesthetic practical theology.

A Wesleyan engaged aesthetic pedagogy can enhance the process of transformation while it dovetails with attending to the means of grace and employs Wesley's organizational structure of small groups. I contend that an aesthetic approach to education that accommodates embodiment, giving form, foregrounding, paying attention and holding in tension, is an extension of the way in which Wesley thought about and practiced his theology of holiness. Grounded in that historical connection, but encompassing contemporary theory, this dissertation fulfills several of the recommendations of earlier Nazarene researchers, such as the exploration of distinct aspects of John Wesley's educational perspective for the Nazarene church;<sup>70</sup> the influence of experience on John Wesley's educational practices;<sup>71</sup> and a dialogue

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<sup>68</sup> E.g. in Matthaiei, *Making Disciples*; Matthaiei, *Faith in Formation*; Blevins and Maddix, *Discovering Discipleship*.

<sup>69</sup> See Blevins, "Means of Grace," 297-391; Blevins and Maddix, *Discovering Discipleship*, 83-96; and Matthaiei, *Making Disciples*.

<sup>70</sup> Maddix, "Reflecting John Wesley's Theology," 236; Maddix recommended research in the Nazarene congregations, whereas my research concerns Nazarene theology and educational practices in general.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

between concepts and practices in Wesleyan theology that leads to a more faithful Wesleyan Christian religious education.<sup>72</sup>

### Theological Aesthetic Reflection and the Hospitality of Art

The five aspects of engaged aesthetics involve the whole person while reflecting on the relationship of his or her practice-laden beliefs and belief-laden practices. Engaged aesthetics concentrates on the theological meaning-making that facilitates a holistic faith with beliefs enacted in daily life. Nevertheless, the “home” of aesthetics is the study of beauty and art. Research on what happens when people look at art, and make sense of what they see, indicates that looking at an entity as rich with meaning as an art object, has the potential to give viewers new insights into their own lives.<sup>73</sup>

The argument in favor of the aesthetic as a source of signification, is affirmed by researchers in the new field of neuro-aesthetics.<sup>74</sup> Zdravko Radman, for instance, claims

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<sup>72</sup> Blevins, “Means of Grace,” 388.

<sup>73</sup> Eric Jensen, *Arts with the Brain in Mind*, (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001), 66-68; John Dewey, “The Act of Expression” in *Art as Experience* ((New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 60-84.

<sup>74</sup> E.g. Zdravko Radman, “Body, Brain, and Beauty: The Place of Aesthetics in the World of the Mind,” *Diogenes* 59, no. 1-2 (2012): 41-51, accessed March 3, 2016. See also, for instance, Anjan Chatterjee, “The Aesthetic Brain: How We Evolved to Desire Beauty and Enjoy Art” (Oxford Scholarship Online, January 2014), accessed September 28, 2017; Anjan Chatterjee and Oshin Vartanian, “Neuroaesthetics,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 18, no. 7 (July 2014): 370-75; A. Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1994); Mengfei Huang, “The Neuroscience of Art,” *Stanford Journal of Neuroscience* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2009): 24-26; Markus Kiefer and Natalie M. Trumpp, “Embodiment Theory and Education: The Foundations of Cognition in Perception and Action,” *Trends in Neuroscience and Education* 1 (2012): 15-20; W.P. Seeley, “What is the Cognitive Neuroscience of Art ... And Why Should We Care?” *American Society for Aesthetics Newsletter* (Summer 2011); Edward A. Vessel, G. Gabrielle Stan, and Nava Rubin, “The Brain on Art: Intense Aesthetic Experience Activates the Default Mode Network,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 6, Article 66 (April 2012): 1-17, accessed September 28, 2017.

that “the nature of human cognition and action” cannot be adequately explained without the role of aesthetics in the process of cognition.<sup>75</sup>

Not taking into account the aesthetic is deficient and doomed to incompleteness. Unfortunately, as it seems, these and similar attempts [to place aesthetics in the context of cognition] have not made much impact, and aesthetics has remained largely insensitive to acknowledge its own importance within endeavors to disclose the nature of human mentality. And yet things have been changing recently, and attempts to perceive artistic creativity in the cognitivist light are to be welcomed.<sup>76</sup>

The changing field of neuroscience, especially the area of visual perception, currently confirms that meaning-making occurs in the process of perceiving and making sense of what is seen.<sup>77</sup> The findings of this new field affirm the possibilities of change in thinking and behavior through the process of art viewing. Studies in the neuroscience of perception and in neuro-aesthetics need to be added to the fields of neuro-education and the neuroscientific studies of religious experience in order to inform a truly transformational Christian education approach.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Radman, “Body, Brain, and Beauty,” 41.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>77</sup> Neuroscientific studies of blind people seem to indicate that the neural perceptual process is “visual” because it is hardwired to use visual imagery, independent of the actual perception through the senses. E.g. Francesco Ferretti, “Blindness, Visual Content and Neuroscience,” accessed March 7, 2018, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265190999\\_Blindness\\_Visual\\_Content\\_and\\_Neuroscience](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265190999_Blindness_Visual_Content_and_Neuroscience); Marina Bedny and Rebecca Saxe, “Insights into the Origins of Knowledge from the Cognitive Neuroscience of Blindness,” *Cognitive Neuropsychology* 29, no. 1-2 (2012): 56-84. See also Eric. R. Kandel, *The Age of Insight: The Quest to Understand the Unconscious in Art, Mind, and the Brain, from Vienna 1900 to the Present* (New York: Random House, 2012), 233-234.

<sup>78</sup> See Dean G. Blevins, “Transformational Teaching Insights from Neuroscience,” *Christian Education Journal* 10, no. 2 (2013): 407-23 for Blevins’ appeal to pay attention to the neurosciences for transformational teaching.

### Aesthetic Christian Education: Personal and Communal

The transformation sought through engaged aesthetic Christian education is intensely personal; it involves people's individual processing of the meaning of art, and how this connects to their life experiences, contexts, personal preferences, feelings and memories. At the same time, the process is inevitably communal. Art viewing is always a conversation between beholder, art subject and artist.<sup>79</sup> When art is viewed in a safe group environment, people are confirmed, stretched, challenged, and informed by each other's observations and associations. The guided aesthetic reflection focuses on the reciprocity between faith-in-belief-statements and faith-in-action. In this sense, an engaged aesthetic pedagogy inescapably addresses social issues of inequality and injustice as age-old questions arise, such as, who is my neighbor? (Luke 10:25-37); who are the least of these brothers and sisters that we are to feed, and clothe, and visit? (Matthew 25:32-46); how are we to forgive those who have sinned against us? (Matthew 6:12). This kind of Christian education has the potential, in the words Allen Moore, "to transform the cultural contradiction [of critical consciousness and cultural forces] in order that a synthesis between what people believe and do may take place."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> The depth of the exchange depends on understanding the "language" of art and learning to invest time to let the partners in the conversation "speak."

<sup>80</sup> Allen J. Moore, "A Social Theory of Religious Education," in *Religious Education as Social Transformation*, ed. Allen J. Moore (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1989), 25. Moore refers to Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 180ff. See also Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Education for Continuity & Change: A New Model for Christian Religious Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), where she argues for the need to connect the historical traditions to people's experiences in the current time, through a model of education that offers "a renewed vision of how continuity and change exist in relationship, ... an educational model for stimulating both and enhancing this relationship" (20).

### Wesleyan Aesthetic Christian Education

As Wesley's goal was the transformation of believers into holy people, he also accorded an important role to the "affections" by which he meant feelings and inclinations as well as the will.<sup>81</sup> Wesley's theology included both God's activity and humans' response.<sup>82</sup> He therefore held a holistic view of how human beings can change, which includes their will, their understanding, their emotions, in response to God's gracious work and presence. An aesthetic pedagogy, with its inclusion of the affections, can bridge the gap between stated beliefs and the practices of holy living, because "research has revealed that it is the affective ways of knowing that prioritize experience and identify for the learner what is personally most significant in the process of reflection."<sup>83</sup> Such a creative approach is compatible with Wesley's experiential theology, a theology for which Wesley used arguments from experience to formulate and support doctrine, but also a theology that he wanted his followers to experience in their own lives.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Maddox, "Reconnecting the Means to the End," 40. See also Richard B. Steele, "*Gracious Affections*" and "*True Virtue*" according to Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1994); Gregory S. Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections: His Views on Experience and Emotion and Their Role in the Christian Life and Theology* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1989).

<sup>82</sup> Maddox, "Reconnecting the Means and the End," 38-44.

<sup>83</sup> Edward W. Taylor, "Transformative Learning in Practice," in *Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education*, ed. Jack Mezirow and Edward W. Taylor (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 4.

<sup>84</sup> See, for instance, Thomas Oden's descriptions of this dynamic process in *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994): "We see Wesley's quadrilateral theological method more consciously unfolding here [in

Aesthetic pedagogy is not only affective and experiential; it is also imaginative, i.e. it makes use of the imagination by “actively fusing the fleeting impingements of sensation into a recognizable whole.”<sup>85</sup> This imaginative way of teaching can provide, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, the pathways for transformation.<sup>86</sup> Maria Harris, the trailblazer for aesthetic pedagogy in Christian religious education, made a strong case for the transforming power present in the cooperation of creative teachers with the Holy Spirit:

I believe the Spirit is waiting to be summoned by teachers who are willing to take care, take steps, take form, take time, and take risks. Outcomes cannot be guaranteed, but the power of imagination is such that if it emerges from our lives, a fire is enkindled and begins to burn. And that fire enables movement in the direction all teaching moves, the direction of re-creation.<sup>87</sup>

For the Church of the Nazarene, an aesthetic approach to Christian education,

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the doctrine of sin] than anywhere else in his writings. We see him first working with historical arguments, then experiential and sociological arguments, and finally with early patristic and scriptural arguments” (160); “Wesley urged that all preachers in his connection of spiritual formation make a point of teaching the way of holiness to believers ‘constantly, strongly, and explicitly,’ and that all class leaders should be attentive to this doctrine and ‘continually agonize’ for its experiential appropriation” (311). Quotes are from *A Plain Account of Perfection*, 26). See chapter 3 for the argument that Wesley’s use of “experience” as source of knowledge was not limited to spiritual experience.

<sup>85</sup> Maria Harris, *Teaching and the Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 7. She credits Kant and Coleridge for understanding imagination not as “fantasy or make-believe,” but as “active intelligence, reaching out in a primordial, preconscious enterprise of comparison and selective recognition” (ibid.).

<sup>86</sup> On the role of human cooperation with the Holy Spirit, see, for instance, John Wesley, Sermon 85, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” §III.7, in *Sermons III*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 3 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 208-9; hereafter cited as *Works*. In contrast to the Calvinist doctrine of the sovereignty of God, Wesley believed that preventent grace enabled humans to respond to God and participate in the work of God. However, as Kenneth Collins states, even that partnership is situated in the larger activity of God’s grace. Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and The Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 12-13. Indeed, all of Christian life is a gift of God’s grace. This dissertation addresses a small, yet important, way in which humans can better cooperate with God, leaving more room for attuning to and harmonizing with the Holy Spirit in that work.

<sup>87</sup> Harris, *Teaching and the Religious Imagination*, 181.

rooted in Wesley's holistic practical theology, can provide a holiness identity rooted in understanding, feelings and, experience. A Wesleyan aesthetic pedagogy facilitates God's sanctifying grace by making room for the Holy Spirit to work through deep, imaginative reflection, appropriation, and incarnation of the truths of faith.

## CHAPTER 2

### WESLEY'S PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I establish the foundation for addressing the congruence gap in the Church of the Nazarene between people's beliefs about holiness and their holiness practices as a practical theological issue. Since Nazarene theologians find guidance in John Wesley's theology, the question arises whether Wesley's beliefs and practices can shed light on this matter. In order to do that, the specific practical theological paradigm of the interconnection between Wesley's faith statements and faith practices needs to be taken into consideration. I take on that task, because only when Wesley's theology is seen as a practical theology, is the aesthetic quality of his theology visible. As I argue that Wesley's theology is indeed a practical theology, the groundwork is laid for an approach to aesthetic Christian education that specifically targets the lack of correspondence of beliefs and actions.

#### Wesley's Theology: Pragmatic, Pastoral, or Practical?

Many have called John Wesley's theology a practical theology.<sup>1</sup> John Wesley

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Klaus Arnold, "Wesleyan Theology: A Practical Theology," *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 7, no. 1 (June 2007), accessed March 3, 2013, <http://didache.nazarene.org/index.php/volume-6-2/4-gtiie-arnold/file>; Frank Baker, "John Wesley and Practical Divinity," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 22, no. 1 (1987): 7-15; Kenneth J. Collins, "A Reconfiguration of Power: The Basic Trajectory in John Wesley's Practical Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33, no. 1 (1998): 164-84; Thomas A. Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983); Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994); Donald A. D. Thorsen, "Experimental Method in the Practical Theology of John Wesley," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 24, no. 1-2 (1989): 117-41.

himself did so: “I have one point in view—to promote, so far as I am able, vital, practical religion.”<sup>2</sup> He distinguished practical theology from other branches of theology, such as speculative theology, controversial theology, mystical theology, or natural theology.<sup>3</sup>

Wesley did not engage in mysticism as he understood it, or focus extensively on philosophical arguments from creation. However, he was no stranger to systematic theology and apologetics. He received formal education in systematic theology, in which “he delighted, and showed great skill.”<sup>4</sup> As he matured, however,

the driving force behind Wesley's approach to theology was assuredly not that of academic excitement and stimulus in the acquisition or sorting out of new knowledge about the fundamental human urge towards religion, nor the prestige that this might generate. It was rather the deep concern for spiritual values, for understanding God's purposes for His creatures, with His gift of free will to enable the growth of personality, accompanied of necessity by the danger that such a creature might seek his own will rather than that of his Creator—the selfishness which is sin.<sup>5</sup>

Wesley was a “folk theologian” who preached and spoke “plain truth for plain people.”<sup>6</sup>

He used the terms “practical divinity” or “practical religion” to indicate the kind of

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<sup>2</sup> Wesley, Letter to the Rev. Samuel Walker (September 3, 1756), ¶26-27, in *Letters III*, ed. Ted Campbell, vol. 27 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 27:52-53, hereafter cited as *Works*. For other examples, see Wesley's introductions to *A Collection of Hymns, for the Use of the People called Methodists* (1780) and to *A Pocket Hymn Book, for the Use of Christians of all Denominations* (1787), the subtitle of *The Christian Library* (1749-1755), and Wesley's commentary on Romans 14:19 Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, 4<sup>th</sup> Am. ed. (New York: Abraham Paul, 1818), 414.

<sup>3</sup> Randy L. Maddox, “John Wesley – Practical Theologian?,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 23 (1988): 127-28.

<sup>4</sup> Baker, “John Wesley and Practical Divinity,” 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Albert C. Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources—Tidings, 1975), 3; Wesley, “Preface,” §3, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, in *Works*, 1:104.

theology in which he engaged, as well as its objective.<sup>7</sup> Much of Wesley's theological activity can be categorized as practical care for the well-being of people—spiritual and otherwise—i.e. the “nurturing of Christian life.”<sup>8</sup> This does not give license, however, indiscriminately to call Wesley's theology practical theology. As Maddox warns,

it is clear that Wesley considered at least *part* of his theological activity to be practical theology. Most of his interpreters make a stronger claim than this. They consider practical theology to be the *defining* type of his theological activity. The question this raises, of course, is what *they* mean by practical theology—as ascribed to Wesley.<sup>9</sup>

In what way, then, can Wesley's theology be considered a practical theology?

With at least one exception, all scholars who have argued that Wesley's theology is a practical theology, argue in fact for a *pragmatic* theology or a *pastoral* theology, broadly or narrowly defined. An exception is Randy Maddox in his article “John Wesley – Practical Theologian?”<sup>10</sup> Here Maddox first presents an historical overview of the study of practical theology and a description of the challenges of practical theology as a contemporary academic discipline. He then explores the meaning of “practical” in Wesley's time and compares Wesley's theology to various contemporary classifications of practical theology, as *Glaubeshlehre*, pastoral theology, popular theology, moral

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<sup>7</sup> Langford, *Practical Divinity*, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Maddox, “John Wesley – Practical Theologian?,” 127-28.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 128 (emphasis in original).

<sup>10</sup> Maddox's book *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994) is not an apology for Wesley's theology being a practical theology. For that argument, he refers to his article “John Wesley – Practical Theologian?,” 122–47. See also Randy L. Maddox, “Practical Theology: A Discipline in Search of a Definition,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 18, no. 2 (1991): 159-69.

theology, and spiritual theology.<sup>11</sup> Not satisfied with any of these designations, Maddox concludes this list with the category of “theology as practical:”

Having suggested the inadequacy of the other identifications of practical theology as characterizations of Wesley’s overall theology, we come to our main thesis: When his work is considered as a whole, Wesley’s theological activity is analogous to the early Christian approach to theology *per se* as a practical endeavor.<sup>12</sup>

Maddox argues that Wesley’s work “considered as a whole,” consists of different writings, which “should demonstrate his actual embodiment of such praxis-related theology,” namely creeds, liturgies and prayers, sermons, Bible study aids, hymns, minutes of conferences, occasional essays, catechetical materials, other educational and devotional materials, journals, and letters.<sup>13</sup> Maddox’s argument that Wesley’s theology is practical theology hinges on his description of these theological expressions as “the embodiment of such praxis-laden theology.”<sup>14</sup> He recognizes the primacy of practice in practical theology as the work of “relating ... doctrinal reflection to the primary theological activities that address directly the concerns arising from Christian praxis in the world.”<sup>15</sup> However, Maddox only takes into consideration one of Wesley’s practices, namely *writing*.<sup>16</sup> I argue that *other* practices, as well as writing, need to be considered as

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<sup>11</sup> Maddox, “John Wesley – Practical Theologian?,” 128-30.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 130 (emphasis in original).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 131-32.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>16</sup> With the exception of the Conferences: “A sixth form of Wesley’s practical theological activity was the holding of periodic conferences with his preachers.” However, Maddox focuses on the *written* minutes of the Conferences.

embodiments of praxis-laden beliefs, namely the actual actions of Wesley in ministry, as far as we have access to them.

The epitaph on Wesley's tombstone states his legacy to be "to revive, enforce, and defend the pure, apostolical doctrines and practices of the primitive church, which he continued to do, *by his writings and his labors*, for more than half a century."<sup>17</sup> His labors were many: among others, preaching, organizing structures for the movement, designing chapels, advocating for social reform, educating and training, feeding the poor, visiting the prisoners, tending to the sick, writing, editing and publishing. The actions of Wesley were as much part of his theology as his doctrinal, apologetic, pastoral, or devotional writings. Investigating his "labors" will ensure that we give attention not only to practice-laden beliefs, but also to belief-laden practices. It is the correspondence of these two that mark Wesley's theology as practical theology. Once this can be established, the aesthetic character of Wesley's practical theology becomes clear, which then becomes the impetus for an aesthetic educational solution of the congruence gap in the Church of the Nazarene.

### **Wesley's Espoused Theology: Praxis-laden Beliefs**

Let us examine two representative examples of Wesley's theology to determine if they can be considered practice-laden beliefs. The first example is *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, in which Wesley gave an overview of his theology. The second

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<sup>17</sup> John Whitehead, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* (Boston: J. McLeish, 1844), 544 (emphasis added).

representation of Wesley' theology is a sermon series expounding the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7.

### A Plain Account of Christian Perfection

Wesley wrote *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* to defend his commitment to the theology of holiness of heart and life during all of his preaching ministry.<sup>18</sup> In 1766, Wesley published this account of his beliefs and teaching from 1725 to 1765; in 1785, he published an updated, fifth edition that covered 1725 to 1777. The report showed in Wesley's own words that he considered it inconceivable that a believer's espoused theology and operant theology would differ.<sup>19</sup> Wesley was convinced that the proof of a transformed life was in what people believed and testified, but also in living out what they believed to be true: "Scriptural perfection is pure love filling the heart, and governing all the words and actions."<sup>20</sup>

Wesley expressed the unquestionable connection of beliefs and practice in several ways. First he mentioned that total devotion to God is "the absolute necessity" for

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<sup>18</sup> Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1766), in *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, §27, in *Works*, 13:189.

<sup>19</sup> To be sure, one could adhere to certain theological tenets, such as justification or entire sanctification, without having the experience *yet*. Nevertheless, the life of the seeker would be characterized by engaging in certain practices in preparation for the gift of grace that bestows justification and entire sanctification through the working of the Holy Spirit. As Wesley said in answer to the question, "How are we to wait for this change [of entire sanctification]? ... Not in careless indifference, or indolent inactivity; but in vigorous, universal obedience, in a zealous keeping of all the commandments, in watchfulness and painfulness, in denying ourselves, and taking up our cross daily; as well as in earnest prayer and fasting, and a close attendance on all the ordinances of God." Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, §19, ¶26-32, in *Works*, 13:175.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, §19, 13:174.

Christians; everything a believer is and everything a believer has, is involved in the life of faith.<sup>21</sup> Wesley was convinced of this truth already around 1727 after reading William Law's *Christian Perfection* and *Serious Call*.<sup>22</sup> Two years later, he gave his time to serious study of the Bible and he found another "indispensable necessity," namely to have the mind which was in Christ and to walk as Christ also walked.<sup>23</sup> This theme also showed up in his early publications, such as *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739). For Wesley, then, the perfected Christian was one whose heart "in retirement or company, in leisure, business, or conversation, ... is ever with the Lord."<sup>24</sup>

Twenty years later at the Conference, when Wesley was challenged about Christian perfection, he gave this definition: "Loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This implies, that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words and actions, are governed by pure love."<sup>25</sup> Wesley answered the question "But how can every thought, word, and work, be governed by pure love and the man be subject at the same time to ignorance and mistake?" by conceding that "a mistake in judgment may possibly occasion a mistake in practice. ... Yet, where every word and action springs from love, such a mistake is not openly a sin. However, it

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., §10, 13:142-45.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., §4, 13:137.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., §5, 13:137. Tammie Grimm points out that Wesley repeatedly used those two Scriptural phrases, "having the mind that was in Christ" (Philippians 2:5) and he who "so walks as" Christ "also walked" (I John 2:6), to indicate the character of a true disciple. Tammy M. Grimm, "Holistic and Holy Transformation: The Practice of Wesleyan Discipleship and Transformative Learning Theory" (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2016), 18.

<sup>24</sup> Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, §10, in *Works*, 13:143.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., §19, 13:167.

cannot bear the rigor of God’s justice, but needs the atoning blood.”<sup>26</sup> All of a person’s being and doing falls equally under God’s justification. To the question about “reasonable proof” of someone’s state of Christian perfection, Wesley gave a three-fold reply: there must be evidence that the word of this person is trustworthy, this person must give testimony of the experience, and thirdly, “it were appeared that all his subsequent words and actions were holy and unblamable.”<sup>27</sup> When these conditions were met, Wesley found that he “ought in reason to believe” the person’s testimony, even if mistakes in judgment and practice might still be made.<sup>28</sup> He warned, though, against the expectation that the “perfect one” would be different outwardly from “the common believers;” God measures the outward works by the amount of inward grace given, which cannot be seen.<sup>29</sup>

Starting in §27, Wesley discussed what the life of a Christian looks like when the fruit of the Spirit gives evidence of the person’s perfection. He included very basic daily practices in the transformation of the sanctified Christian life, and expressed similar comprehensiveness in his fourth advice on how to seek faith and holiness: “Do all the good you possibly can, *to the bodies and souls of men*... let your whole spirit and behavior refute the slander [of being idle].”<sup>30</sup> Ministering to others not only involves their

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., §19, 13:168.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., §19, 13:172.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., §19, 13:173. On the next page, Wesley also cautioned against judging others by what they do on the basis of some standard of holiness that may not be scriptural.

<sup>30</sup> Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1966), 101 (emphasis added).

spirits, but also their physical well-being, and the believer's actions should be in line with the believer's faith when engaged in God's work.

In his final advice, Wesley stressed the need for congruency in the Christian life, even in minute details, and he ended his defense of Christian perfection with this summary:

In one view, it is purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God. It is the giving God all our heart, it is one desire and design ruling all our tempers. It is the devoting, not a part, but all, our soul, body, and substance, to God. In another view, it is all the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked. It is the circumcision of the heart from all filthiness, all inward as well as outward pollution. It is a renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of Him that created it. And yet another, it is the loving of God with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves.<sup>31</sup>

Wesley's own recapitulation of his beliefs shows ample evidence of being infused with praxis. No hint of separation appeared to suggest that, for Wesley, a Christian could believe in God without exhibiting the attending practices of faith. On the contrary, the goal and heart of Christian life—to love God with one's whole person, and one's neighbor as oneself—included all the aspects of living.

#### The Sermon on the Mount

Another strong example of Wesley's practice-laden beliefs comes from his sermon series "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount." In thirteen sermons, Wesley expounded on Matthew 5-7, emphasizing three main themes: "the sum of true religion" (*Discourses I-III*, 1748), "rules for that right intention which we are to preserve in all our

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 117.

outward actions” (*Discourses IV-IX*, 1748), and “the main hindrances of religion” (*Discourses X-XIII*, 1750).<sup>32</sup> He devised his sermons in accordance with the flow of Jesus’ argument, from the dispositions of the soul in Matthew 5 to the believers’ actions, which “may be made holy, and good, and acceptable to God, by a pure and holy intention” in Matthew 6, to the possible stumbling blocks in Matthew 7.<sup>33</sup> The Sermon on the Mount series was published fairly early in Wesley’s career. Nevertheless, the *Discourses* linguistically have most in common with Wesley’s other sermons; this suggests that they are representative of his whole preaching career and of his theological hermeneutic.<sup>34</sup> Albert Outler remarked that this group of sermons “displays Wesley’s distinctive concern for integration and balance—between the faith that justifies and the faith that works by love” within the collection of *Sermons on Several Occasions*, published in 1746-60, 1771, 1787-88.<sup>35</sup>

Wesley was of the opinion that, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had laid out

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<sup>32</sup> Wesley, Sermon 21, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse I,” Proem §10, in *Works*, 1:474-75; also, Sermon 30, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse X,” §§1-3, in *Works*, 1:650-51. Outler’s dates for the sermons are in Appendix B, 1:708-9.

<sup>33</sup> Wesley, Sermon 26, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse VI,” §1, in *Works*, 1:573.

<sup>34</sup> Dr. Brint Montgomery developed a software program that “mined” the sermons of Wesley for semantic information, similar to genomic data mining. A word is analog to a nucleic acid; a sentence to a group of nucleic acids, a nucleotide; a paragraph is analog to a polymer formed by the nucleotides; and a whole text to the DNA strands composed of the polymer chains. In this way, Montgomery was able to compare the sermons for similar usage of words and phrases. Preliminary results from text data mining of the Sermon on the Mount series show a correlation coefficient of > 0.96 to the whole of Wesley’s sermons. These are raw data, however, that need to be interpreted carefully. Presentation at the Wesley Studies Summer Seminar (Asbury Seminary, 5-29 June 2017); also, personal email correspondence with Brint Montgomery, June 22, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Albert Outler, “An Introductory Comment,” in *Sermons I*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 1 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 1:469; hereafter cited as *Works*.

“the whole plan of his religion, ... a full prospect of Christianity.”<sup>36</sup> Wesley’s treatment of the Sermon of the Mount likewise had a wholeness about it, an “integration of an evangel profoundly ethical with an ethic that is also vividly evangelical.”<sup>37</sup> The *Discourses* can be considered emblematic of Wesley’s sermons and a good example of Wesley’s holistic approach to the Christian life. The sermons that focus on the operant theology of the Christian (*Discourses IV-IX*), in Wesley’s words, “outward religion,” offer therefore good material to examine how praxis-laden Wesley’s beliefs were.

In *Discourse IV*, Wesley tackled the opposition head-on. He dealt with theological positions of those who emphasized the Christian faith as residing in the soul, spirit or will only, without inclusion of the body: “What need of loading [religion] with *doing* and *suffering*?”<sup>38</sup> However, Wesley showed Christianity to be “essentially a social religion,” because Christians need the company of other Christians and of non-Christians in order to be real Christians.<sup>39</sup> Of course, “the *root* of religion lies in the heart, the inmost soul” of a Christian, conceded Wesley, but from there it *cannot but* bring forth “branches” that are of the same nature as the root, and therefore equally essential to faith.<sup>40</sup> In *Discourse V*, Wesley was again at pains to keep faith and works together: only a faith that shows itself in acts of love can be saving faith. He exhorted his listeners and

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<sup>36</sup> Wesley, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse I,” §7, 1:473.

<sup>37</sup> Outler, “An Introductory Comment,” 1:468-69.

<sup>38</sup> Wesley, Sermon 24, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse IV,” §2, in *Works*, 1:532 (emphasis in original).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, §§I.5-9, 1:535-38.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, §III.1, 1:541-42 (emphasis added).

readers to surpass the outward holiness of the Pharisees by being outwardly *and* inwardly holy, doing good in “thoughts, words, and works.”<sup>41</sup>

*Discourse VI* focused on the attitude of heart, the “dispositions, inward tempers and affections” which make all the believers’ actions, no matter how insignificant in themselves, “holy and good and acceptable to God, by a pure and holy intention.”<sup>42</sup> This applied equally to the works of piety—Scripture reading, prayer, fasting—and the works of mercy—giving alms, visiting the sick and the prisoners.<sup>43</sup> In *Discourse VII*, which mainly dealt with fasting, Wesley warned that Satan works to separate what God wants to keep together: inward and outward religion (§1), faith and works (§2), the end and the means of religion (§3).<sup>44</sup>

Wesley continued to relate faith to actions in *Discourse VIII*, concluding from Matt. 6:19 that purity of intention makes not only *religious* actions acceptable to God, but also “common actions” and even our “labour or employment.”<sup>45</sup> In the last *Discourse* on Matthew 6, Wesley returned to the necessary heart condition for faith that works in actions of love. Here he argued that if we do not serve God with our heart and our

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<sup>41</sup> Wesley, Sermon 25, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse V,” §§IV.1-12, in *Works*, 1:560-71 (emphasis added).

<sup>42</sup> Wesley, Sermon 26, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse VI,” §1, in *Works*, 1:573.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, §2, 1:573. Outler lists eighteen occurrences where Wesley holds the works of piety and the works of mercy together. He concludes: “It is worth noting that [Wesley] never set either over against the other.” Sermon 14, §I.13, 1:343n65.

<sup>44</sup> Wesley, Sermon 27, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse VII,” in *Works*, §§1-2, 1:592-93.

<sup>45</sup> Wesley, Sermon 28, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse VIII,” in *Works*, §1, 1:612.

actions, we actually serve other gods, in particular mammon.<sup>46</sup>

By his insistence that actions accompany the Christian's faith, Wesley secured the existential connection between beliefs and practices. Wesley knew from his own and others' experience that beliefs lead to particular actions and, inversely, that one's actions express what one really believes. The relationship is deeply rooted in the triune God as the source and the objective of faith. A separation between a "private" faith and "public" actions were unthinkable in Wesley's worldview, since God's presence and reign encompass all realms.

### Summary

Wesley was adamant in keeping faith and actions together in the defense of his own theology and in his treatment of the ethics of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. The fulfillment of what God required could only come—by the power of the Holy Spirit—through a comprehensive, holistic approach to faith-as-beliefs expressed as faith-in-action. Especially in the sermon series on Matthew 5-7, Wesley showed how much his beliefs were saturated with praxis that embodied the biblical injunctions.

### **Wesley's Operant Theology: Belief-laden Practices**

Next, I will examine two representative examples of Wesley's practices to determine if they can be considered belief-laden practices. The first practice under

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<sup>46</sup> Wesley, Sermon 29, "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse IX," §§4-15, in *Works*, 1:635-39.

consideration is Wesley's work in the area of health care, and the second one Wesley's personal finances. This section scrutinizes Wesley's practices to see if they were infused with belief, just as his stated beliefs required that they be put into action.

### Wesley and Medicine

Among the many works Wesley published is a manual of home remedies, *Primitive Physick: or an Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases*.<sup>47</sup> To a twenty-first century theologian this may seem a strange excursion. However, a closer look at the contemporary situation will show that Wesley was no exception as a clergyman engaged in the medical field. Furthermore, investigation of his methods and various writings will show Wesley's practice of medical care to be an excellent example of belief-laden practice. Here, Wesley's operant theology went hand in hand with his espoused theology.

#### *Medical practice in the eighteenth century*

The status of medical science in the eighteenth century was one of much ignorance and confusion, as physicians plied their trade along with apothecaries, barber-surgeons, and "benevolent amateurs: the squire's lady and the village parson."<sup>48</sup> Since the

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<sup>47</sup> John Wesley, *Primitive Physick: or an Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases* (London: Thomas Trye, 1747).

<sup>48</sup> Henry D. Rack, "Doctors, Demons and Early Methodist Healing," in *The Church and Healing*, ed. W. J. Sheils (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 139. See also Samuel J. Rogal, "Pills for the Poor: John Wesley's *Primitive Physick*," *The Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine* 51 (1978): 81-90; Robert Heller, "'Priests-Doctors' as a Rural Health Service in the Age of Enlightenment," *Medical History* 20, no. 4 (Oct 1976): 361-83. For the complex relationships between physicians, apothecaries, and barbers, see Lester S. King, *The Medical World of the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

available medical knowledge—a mixture of empirically tested information inherited from antiquity and new scientific discoveries—was neither difficult nor extensive, many educated persons were as competent as a physician to dispense “practical physick.”<sup>49</sup> The Church of England prepared its ministers for the care of their people’s physical health by including medical texts in the ministerial course of study.<sup>50</sup> When Wesley studied theology at Christ Church in Oxford, he too read books on medicine. His fascination with medical practice, descriptions and innovation remained for the rest of his life, as evidenced in his reading, writing and publishing.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Rogal, “Pills for the Poor,” 82.

<sup>50</sup> Anglican bishops were authorized to license the ordained clergy for medical practice. Because insufficient numbers of physicians graduated from medical colleges, it was necessary for amateurs to practice medicine. The number of graduates in medicine from Oxford, Cambridge and Edinburgh was roughly 24 a year, with a few more from continental medical schools, for a population of nine million people at the end of the eighteenth century. Physicians were not only few, but they also tended to practice particularly among the well-to-do in the urban areas. In the mid-eighteenth century, that meant there was only one physician for every 10,000 people in London. Even though ecclesial control over licensing in the rural areas “virtually died out” during the eighteenth century, medical manuals still appeared that were dedicated to the clergy for their use to benefit the poor. See A. Wesley Hill, *John Wesley Among the Physicians: A Study of Eighteenth-Century Medicine* (London: Epworth Press, 1958), 2; James G. Donat, “Empirical Medicine in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century: The Rev. John Wesley’s Search for Remedies that Work,” *Methodist History* 44, no. 4 (July 2006): 217; Randy L. Maddox, “Reclaiming the Eccentric Parent: Methodist Reception of John Wesley’s Interest in Medicine,” in *Inward and Outward Health’: John Wesley’s Holistic Concept of Medical Science, the Environment and Holy Living*, ed. Deborah Madden (London: Epworth Press, 2008), 21; and Deborah Madden, “Wesley as Advisor on Health and Healing,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 181.

<sup>51</sup> Maddox has identified almost a hundred publications of medical interest which Wesley mentioned somewhere in his writings. In addition to the books he read, Wesley researched the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* and the *Medical Transactions of the Royal College of Physicians*. Wesley’s medical writings include *Collection of Receipts* (1745), *Primitive Physick* (1747), *Desideratum*, *A Letter to a Friend Concerning Tea* (1748), *Survey of the Wisdom of God in Creation* (1763), two abridgements of Dr. Tissot’s work, namely *Thoughts on the Sin of Onan* (1767), and *Advices with Respect to Health* (1769), an abridgment Dr. Cadogan’s *Dissertation on the Gout* (1771), *An Estimate of the Manners of Present Times* (1782), “Thoughts on Nervous Disorders; Particularly That Which is Usually Termed Lowness of Spirits” (1784), references in diaries and journals on the medical books he read, advice to family and friends in letters, as well as many articles in the *Arminian Magazine* related to interesting or novel medical treatments, discoveries and narratives of cures. Randy L. Maddox, “John Wesley on Holistic Health and Healing,” *Methodist History* 46, no. 1 (October 2007): 5-6; Maddox

*Wesley's Care of the Sick Poor*

Wesley became well aware of the plight of the poor as he visited them. Drunkenness was widespread, petty theft was punishable by death, and debts put thousands in prison every year. Because of open sewers, scant attention to personal hygiene, contaminated food, and poor diet, diseases were rampant.<sup>52</sup> Frequent disturbances and rioting by mobs, fueled by unemployment and severe food shortages due to bad harvests, made for an unstable economic situation.<sup>53</sup>

Wesley's followers were not exempt: "The whole Methodist economy throughout the century bore the marks and signs of the poverty characterizing the lives of the bulk of the members."<sup>54</sup> Their situation became Wesley's burden when he became responsible for more and more Methodists as the spiritual father of his extended parish.<sup>55</sup> He was convinced that his obligations included attending to the poor and sick, according to Christ's command in Matt. 25:35-36.<sup>56</sup> When visits by lay leaders could not meet the

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"Reclaiming the Eccentric Parent," 19; Laura Bartels Felleman, "A Necessary Relationship: John Wesley and the Body-Soul Connection," in *Inward and Outward Health': John Wesley's Holistic Concept of Medical Science, the Environment and Holy Living*, ed. Deborah Madden (London: Epworth, 2008), 153.

<sup>52</sup> Franklin Wilder, *The Remarkable World of John Wesley, Pioneer in Mental Health* (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1978), 40, 63.

<sup>53</sup> For the challenges of the eighteenth century see the chapters "Manifold Disorders," "Widespread Distresses," and "Costly Defeats," in Robert F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Common People of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Epworth Press, 1945), 19-50, 51-76, 77-114.

<sup>54</sup> Wearmouth, 189. The concept of poverty is complex. For an overview of the various definitions, research fields, and conclusions about poverty in eighteenth-century Britain, see Steven King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), especially chapter 5, "Alternative worlds of poverty," 111-40.

<sup>55</sup> Rack, "Doctors, Demons," 139; Maddox, "John Wesley on Holistic Health," 6, 27.

<sup>56</sup> In his commentary to Matt. 25:35, Wesley observed that "all these works of outward mercy suppose faith and love." Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, 86.

needs, and even specially assigned visitors to the sick were spread too thin and too late, Wesley was “in pain for many of the poor that were sick.”<sup>57</sup> He undertook several ineffective efforts to make their healthcare less expensive and more adequate.<sup>58</sup> Finally, Wesley “thought of a kind of desperate expedient,” namely to supply the administrations of a physician himself.<sup>59</sup> And so he started a free dispensary in London, Bristol and Newcastle.<sup>60</sup>

*Primitive Physick; Easy and Natural*

Soon the dispensaries proved too expensive, but rather than abandon the care for the sick—which would have violated his beliefs—Wesley changed his avenue of assistance. In 1745, Wesley had already prepared a booklet, *Collection of Receipts for the Use of the Poor*, for the visitors of the sick to provide simple remedies; and the poor themselves could use it as a medical resource. In an effort to broaden his reach, Wesley published an expanded version of the *Collection* in 1747, called *Primitive Physick: Or,*

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<sup>57</sup> John Wesley, *A Plain Account of The People Called Methodist (1748)*, §XII.1, in vol. 8 of *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 14 vols., 8:263; hereafter cited as *Works* (Jackson). Wesley wrote that he “saw poor people pining away and several families ruined [when their breadwinner died], and that without remedy” (ibid.).

<sup>58</sup> The services of a physician, as well as the compounded medicines prescribed by physicians, were often not accessible to or affordable by the laboring poor. See King, *The Medical World*, 10-12.

<sup>59</sup> Wesley, *People Called Methodists*, §XII.2, 8:264. In his letter to “John Smith” on 25 March 1747, §11, Wesley defended his own doctoring. A licensed physician was often too far away and would have been too late and too expensive, and so, “instead of an orderly cure, the patient dies.” Wesley felt morally obligated to act: “and God requires [the patient’s] blood at my hands!” Wesley, *Letters II*, ed. Frank Baker, in *Works*, 26:236.

<sup>60</sup> See L. Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. Founder of the Methodists*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1872), 525-27. Hill, *John Wesley among the Physicians*, 1. Also, Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 186.

*An Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases*; 119 pages containing 243 disorders with 725 remedies. In the “Preface,” Wesley explained the theological origin of sickness in the rebellion of humankind against their Creator. However, God provided the cure for humankind’s diseases in creation through simple remedies that were available and affordable.<sup>61</sup> Undergirded by his theology of sin, forgiveness, healing, grace and creation, Wesley provided the *Primitive Physick* to keep the poor from “wasting their Fortunes” and from suffering “either thro’ the Ignorance or Knavery of Physicians.”<sup>62</sup>

### *Holistic Approach*

Wesley’s medical publications and advice must be seen not only in the context of his time, his personal history and his station of life, but most importantly, as an expression of his belief in God’s provision for people’s well-being. Wesley considered that *Primitive Physick* ought to be in every house, together with his abstract of Thomas à

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<sup>61</sup> Bardell has identified that of the 225 kinds of drugs used for 530 remedies provided by Wesley, 184 came from plants, seventeen from animals, and twenty-four from minerals. Eunice Bonow Bardell, “John Wesley’s Receipts,” *Pharmacy in History* 21, no. 3 (1979): 119.

<sup>62</sup> “Preface,” in *Primitive Physick*, xv. Wesley’s manual was unusual in three ways. First, it was simple to use because the disorders were listed alphabetically. Second, the remedies included plant names in English instead of traditional medical Latin. And third, Wesley had a readership in mind that included the lower classes, not just educated people who administered the remedies, in contrast to the medical manuals of that time. *Primitive Physick* was accessible by the people themselves because of Wesley’s comprehensive approach that included not only the publishing of a medical manual in language understandable to the poor and uneducated, but also the organizing of a system of education through which the poor learned to read. Madden states that “Wesley’s principle of practical piety coalesced with educative ideals to improve knowledge and literacy levels amongst his followers.” Bardell, “John Wesley’s Receipts,” 116; Donat, “Empirical Medicine,” 216; Deborah Madden, “The Limitation of Human Knowledge: Faith and the Empirical Method in John Wesley’s Medical Holism,” *History of European Ideas* 32, no. 2 (2006): 171; and Vicki Tolar Burton, “John Wesley and the Liberty to Speak: The Rhetorical and Literacy Practices of Early Methodism,” *College Composition and Communication* 53, no. 1 (September 2001): 65-91.

Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*.<sup>63</sup> By producing affordable literature for spiritual and physical health, Wesley empowered his lay ministers, be they preachers, assistants or visitors of the sick, to take care of themselves and their loved ones. Many of the Methodists charged and authorized by Wesley to visit the sick were women.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, Wesley's literature empowered the laboring poor to take responsibility for their own spiritual and physical health.<sup>65</sup> Among them, again, were many women who took action to better the circumstances for themselves, their families and neighbors.<sup>66</sup>

Wesley's system of medical care was part of his comprehensive approach to holiness of heart and life; it was a "central dimension" of his work.<sup>67</sup> As evangelist, he cared about the eternal salvation of his fellow human beings, but the Methodist engagement in works of mercy was not merely a prelude to evangelization.<sup>68</sup> Caring for

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<sup>63</sup> Wesley, "Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and Others: From the Year 1744 to 1789," Answer to Question 42, in *Addresses, Essays, Letters, in Works* (Jackson) 8:329; Wesley, To the Societies at Bristol, (October 1764), in *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. John Telford (London: Epworth Press, 1931), vol. 4, 272; hereafter cited as *Letters* (Telford). What *Primitive Physick* was for guidance in physical health, *The Imitation* was for guidance in spiritual health. See Maddox, "John Wesley on Holistic Health," 9.

<sup>64</sup> Phyllis Mack, "Does Gender Matter: Suffering and Salvation in Eighteenth-Century Methodism," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 85, no. 2-3 (2003): 157-76.

<sup>65</sup> Deborah Madden, "Pastor and Physician: John Wesley's Cure for Consumption," in *Inward and Outward Health: John Wesley's Holistic Concept of Medical Science, the Environment and Holy Living*, ed. Deborah Madden (London: Epworth Press, 2008), 113.

<sup>66</sup> Deborah Madden, "Experience and the Common Interest of Mankind: The Enlightened Empiricism of John Wesley's *Primitive Physick*," *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 26, no. 1 (2003): 51.

<sup>67</sup> Maddox, "John Wesley on Holistic Health," 4.

<sup>68</sup> E.g., "As he [the Methodist] has time, he 'does good unto all men'; unto neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies: And that in every possible kind; not only to their bodies, by 'feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those that are sick or in prison'; but much more does he labor to do good to their souls ..." Wesley, "The Character of a Methodist," §16, in *Works* (Jackson), 8:346. Also Wesley, "On Visiting the Sick," §II.4, 6, in *Works*, 3:391-92; Randy L. Maddox, "'Visiting the Poor': John Wesley, the

the sick poor was, for Wesley, an expression of holy love, as well as a necessity for the spiritual health of the one who is serving others.<sup>69</sup>

In his holistic approach, Wesley carefully balanced spiritual and physical health. He understood that the one influences the other.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, Wesley realized that the spiritual and the temporal came together in how people *experienced* their illness.<sup>71</sup> He recognized the role emotions played in physical health, as well as the influence of spiritual health on the emotions—and vice versa—without treating physical illness or emotional upheaval exclusively as a spiritual problem, or even a punishment by God.<sup>72</sup> Although Wesley did not automatically seek a spiritual cure for bodily sickness, he did believe in faith healing and was, on occasion, the channel for divine healing.<sup>73</sup> For Wesley, natural healing and supernatural healing complemented each other. To a

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Poor and the Sanctification of Believers,” in *The Wesleys and the Poor: The Legacy and Development of Methodist Attitudes to Poverty, 1729-1999*, ed. Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2002), 69.

<sup>69</sup> Wesley, “Upon The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse IV,” §III.7, 1:545-55; “On Visiting the Sick,” §§1-4; §III.9, 3:385-88, 397. In a journal entry of 24 November 1760 Wesley said, “I visited as many as I could of the sick... And that both for our own sake and theirs. For *theirs*, as it is so much more comfortable to them, and as we may then assist them in spirituals as well as temporals. And for *our own*, as it is far more apt to soften our heart and to make us *naturally care* for each other.” Wesley, *Journals and Diaries IV (1755-1765)*, in *Works*, 19:290 (emphasis in original).

<sup>70</sup> E.g. Wesley, sermon 47, “Heaviness through Manifold Temptations,” §II.3, 2:225. Wesley considered some disorders to be psychological in nature, and some had a demonic origin. Although the Anglican church did not practice exorcisms any longer, Wesley reported demon possession and exorcisms, as well as convulsions that accompanied conversions. Felleman, “A Necessary Relationship,” 163-64.

<sup>71</sup> Madden, “Pastor and Physician,” 97. Madden looks at length at Wesley’s correspondence with John Valton, who suffered from consumption and melancholy (97-101).

<sup>72</sup> Wesley resisted offering spiritual means of healing to the exclusion of other ways, nor did he condone the impression that the absence of healing implied a lack of faith, a leaning to which Charles was prone. Maddox, “John Wesley on Holistic Health,” 11; Madden, “Wesley as Advisor,” 182.

<sup>73</sup> Wesley reported frequently in his Journals and the *Arminian Magazine* about faith healing, miraculous cures and supernatural returns to health.

depressed friend, he advised that “it will be a double blessing if you give yourself up to the Great Physician, that He may heal *soul and body together*. And unquestionably this is His design. He wants to give you . . . both inward and outward health.”<sup>74</sup> Since the body and the soul were both created, redeemed, and healed by God, Wesley maintained their inextricable connection throughout his work.<sup>75</sup>

### *Summary*

The analysis of Wesley’s medical work shows his beliefs in action. He acted out of the conviction that he—just as every Christian—was commended by Christ to take care of the sick. His work grew from personal visits to the sick, to organizing lay visitors, publishing health manuals, and dispensing medicine and advice through free clinics and correspondence. Wesley had a complex understanding of the many aspects of illness: social, economic, physical, emotional, and spiritual. But ultimately, he acted in accordance to what he himself taught others: “to inquire into the state of [the sick persons’] souls, and to advise them as occasion may require. To inquire into their disorders, and procure advice for them. To relieve them, if they are in want. To do anything for them, which he (or she) can do.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Wesley, Letter to Alexander Knox (26 October 1778), in *Letters* (Telford) vol. 6, 327 (emphasis added).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 318; sermon 55, “On the Trinity,” §§11-13, 2:382-83; sermon 57, “On the Fall of Man,” §II.2, 2:405.

<sup>76</sup> Wesley, *People Called Methodists*, §XI.4, in *Works* (Jackson), 8:263.

## Wesley and Money

Wesley's dealings with money were greatly influenced by his upbringing and his subsequent spiritual formation. During his childhood and school years, he knew poverty; he was often in debt and had to borrow money. His involvement in the Holy Club changed his philosophy of finances and set him on the path that he was to follow for the rest of his life. In 1786, Wesley retold an experience that impressed on him not just the plight of the poor, but his Christian duty to them:

Many years ago, when I was at Oxford, in a cold winter's day, a young maid (one of those we kept at school) called upon me. I said, "You seem half-starved. Have you nothing to cover you but that thin linen gown?" She said, "Sir, this is all I have!" I put my hand in my pocket, but found I had scarce any money left, having just paid away what I had. It immediately struck me, "Will thy Master say, 'Well done, good and faithful steward,' Thou hast adorned thy walls with the money which might have screened this poor creature from the cold! O justice! O mercy! Are not these pictures the blood of this poor maid?" See thy expensive apparel in the same light; thy gown, hat, headdress! Everything which cost more than Christian duty required thee to lay out is the blood of the poor! O be wise for the time to come! Be more merciful! More faithful to God and man! More abundantly adorned (like men and women professing godliness) with good works!<sup>77</sup>

By November 1729, Wesley, then a Fellow at Lincoln College, had joined his brother Charles, William Morgan and one other student to read and discuss the classics and spiritual books.<sup>78</sup> Their activities evolved to include visits to the sick. In August of 1730, the Wesley brothers were convinced by Morgan to visit a prisoner in the Oxford

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<sup>77</sup> Wesley, sermon 88, "On Dress," §16, in *Works*, 3:255. Meredith avers that Wesley actually pulled the pictures from the wall, sold them and gave the money to the poor girl. See William Henry Meredith, *The Real John Wesley* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Pye, 1903), 138.

<sup>78</sup> It is not certain who the fourth student was, although it was most likely Bob Kirkham, a friend of Charles. See Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 84n86, 86.

Castle.<sup>79</sup> This became a regular practice, both to the Oxford Castle and the debtors' prison, Bocardo.<sup>80</sup> The students provided financial and legal assistance out of their own pockets and from donations others gave, sometimes paying off small debts for which people were imprisoned.<sup>81</sup>

*Wesley's earnings, spending, and giving*

Once Wesley had become a Fellow of Lincoln College, he received an annual income of about £ 30, supplemented with tuition from his pupils and fees for preaching.<sup>82</sup> The stipend from his Fellowship continued until he married and resigned in 1751. After that, Wesley receive an allowance of £ 30 a year from the circuit in London.<sup>83</sup> He found ways to live frugally, so that he could give money away, in accordance with Christ's teaching in Matt. 6:19-20, and his own instruction in the *Discourses* on the Sermon on the Mount. He economized on personal appearance, his diet was modest, and he accepted free room and board from his many friends when he traveled.<sup>84</sup> Wesley instructed his

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<sup>79</sup> V.H.H. Green, *The Young Mr. Wesley: A Study of John Wesley and Oxford* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961), 158-59.

<sup>80</sup> Eric McCoy North, "Early Methodist Philanthropy" (PhD diss, Columbia University, New York, 1914), 5.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8; Richard P. Heitzenrater, *John Wesley and the Oxford Methodists, 1725-1735* (PhD diss., Duke University, 1972), 390-91.

<sup>82</sup> £ 30 was "comfortable enough for a young bachelor." Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 49, 76.

<sup>83</sup> Tyerman, *The Life and Times of Wesley*, vol. 3, 615.

<sup>84</sup> E.g. Wesley saved two or three pounds a year on a barber or a fashionable wig by letting his hair grow long. He also resolved to forego tea, both to save money and as an example to the poor: "After talking largely with both the men and women Leaders, we agreed it would prevent great expense, as well of health as of time and of money, if the poorer people of our society could be persuaded to leave off drinking of tea. We resolved ourselves to begin and set the example," July 6, 1746, *Journals and Diaries III (1743-174)*,

preachers and lay people—poor as many of them were—likewise to live as economically as possible, and still give something to charity. Maybe the key to Wesley’s love for the poor was that he truly considered himself to be one of the poor. “If I want anything, I am relieved, even as another poor man.”<sup>85</sup> In the same way, he exhorted others, that “*you should look upon yourself as one of a certain number of indigent persons who are to be provided for out of that portion of His goods wherewith you are entrusted.*”<sup>86</sup>

In the sermon “The More Excellent Way,” Wesley described how he increased his giving, while living on £ 28.<sup>87</sup> Had Wesley accepted his father’s position as vicar of Epworth, supplemented with the curacy at Wroot, his income would have been around £ 180 - £ 220, or had he kept the proceeds from his publications, he would have had several times more to his disposal.<sup>88</sup> However, John Hampson, the earliest biographer of Wesley,

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20:125. As early as 1724, Wesley had read Dr. Cheyne’s *Health and Long Life*, in which a moderate lifestyle was advocated; he adopted the principles Cheyne prescribed, until the practices he originally engaged in to save money became the basis of virtues he pursued for the rest of his life. See Wesley, Letter to Mrs. Susanna Wesley (Nov. 1, 1724), *Letters I (1721-1739)*, in *Works*, 25:151; Frank Baker, “John Wesley at Leisure,” in *Canadian Methodist Historical Society*, ed. Neil Semple (Toronto: CMHS Conference, 1990): 23-35.

<sup>85</sup> Wesley, *People Called Methodists*, §XV.6 in *Works* (Jackson), 8:268.

<sup>86</sup> Wesley, sermon 89, “The More Excellent Way,” §VI.4, in *Works*, 3:275 (emphasis added).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* Wesley describes one of “the young men at Oxford who were called Methodists,” who lived on £ 28 and gave £ 2 away out of an income of £ 30. As the income increased, the young man continued to live on £ 28 and he gave an increasing amount of money away. Many Wesley scholars have taken this “one young man” to be Wesley himself. However, his ledgers show the irregularity of his income at that time; Wesley either did not remember or, more likely, he used hyperbole to illustrate the point of almsgiving. V.H.H. Green, “Wesley’s Income from his Fellowship,” in *The Young Mr. Wesley*, Appendix II, 320-21; Samuel J. Rogal, *The Financial Aspects of John Wesley’s British Methodism (1720-1790)* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 61-115.

<sup>88</sup> The estimates for the Book Room profits are not easy to establish for lack of financial reports until 1796. A detailed examination of the available information leads Norris to assess the increase of the gross profits between 1740 and 1790 to be £ 170 to £ 1,200 per year. However, these numbers do not give an accurate account of how much cash was given to Wesley. Clive Murray Norris, *The Financing of John Wesley’s Methodism c. 1740-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 180.

estimated the sum that Wesley must have donated over the course of his life to be “twenty or thirty thousand pounds,” and if this money would have been “put out at interest, upon good Security,” it would have accumulated to “sixty or seventy thousand pounds.”<sup>89</sup> Henry Moore, who lived with Wesley when he was his assistant, recounted, “I knew he gave away all he had. . . . he sometimes gave away twenty or thirty pounds a day. He was beset with beggars. They knew his times of leaving London and returning as well as he did. . . . He never sent any empty away [*sic*].”<sup>90</sup> Wesley’s generosity was well-known and he often gave away money soon after he received it:

I only fear lest any of it should cleave to me, and should not be able to shake it off before my spirit returns to God. It must indeed pass through my hands, but I will take care (God being my helper) that the mammon of unrighteousness shall only pass through; it shall not rest there. None of the accursed thing shall be found in my tents when the Lord calleth me hence.<sup>91</sup>

Whether from trepidation, obedience to Scriptural commands to give alms, or from a generous character, Wesley gave away much of what he had, even to the point that it landed him in debt.

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<sup>89</sup> John Hampson, *Memoirs of the Late Rev. John Wesley, A.M. with a Review of his Life and Writings, and a History of Methodism, from its Commencement in 1729 to the present Time*, vol. 3 (London: Sunderland, 1791), 186-87. In 1787, Wesley told Samuel Bradburn, a close associate, that he never gave less than £ 1,000 per year. Tyerman, *The Life and Times of Wesley*, vol. 3, 616, 616n3.

<sup>90</sup> William Henry Meredith, *The Real John Wesley* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Pye, 1903), 144-45. Meredith describes one exception, when Wesley, beset by beggars and not having any money on him, “elbowed them away. ‘What,’ said he, ‘am I to try to keep all the poor of the parish?’ It was a frost morning and he slipped and fell at full length on his back. ‘There, Tommy,’ said he [to Tommy Tennant], ‘I’ve got my payment! I ought to have given them good words, at least.’” (145).

<sup>91</sup> Wesley, *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, §96, in *Works* (Jackson), 8:39-40.

*Debts and the spiritual meaning of money*

Wesley's successful publishing business often lacked cash flow.<sup>92</sup> From the 1782 and 1786 reports of John Atlay, the steward of the Book Room, it seems that Wesley received all the surplus cash from the sale of books.<sup>93</sup> He then disposed of the money in his usual manner—he gave it away. This would explain why Wesley was constantly in debt while the sale of books was thriving, “We had our quarterly meeting at London; at which I was surprised to find, that our income does not yet meet our expense. We were again near £ 200 bad. My private account I find still worse. I have labored as much as many writers; and all my labour has gained me, in seventy years, a debt of five or six hundred pounds.”<sup>94</sup> Rogal argues that the debts served to make people sympathize, and even empathize, with Wesley. It also underscored the “plainness” of the Methodists.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Wesley's ministry of publishing seemed a profitable business. See Tyerman, *The Life and Times of Wesley*, vol.3, 155. However, it was not Wesley's intention to amass money from his publications: “Two and forty years ago, having a desire to furnish poor people with cheaper, shorter, and plainer books than any I had seen, I wrote many small tracts, generally a penny apiece; and afterwards several larger. Some of these had such a sale as I never thought of; and by this means I unawares became rich. But I never desired or endeavoured after it.” See sermon 87, “The Dangers of Riches,” §II.7, in *Works*, 3:238-239.

<sup>93</sup> This must have been the practice for a longer time, possibly since the Book Room started in 1753. In 1777, John Atlay commented to Thomas Olivers, “We must stop printing for a while. For Mr. Wesley gives away his money so fast, that I have none left for printing or paper.” Thomas Olivers, *A Rod for a Reviler* (London: J. Fry and Co., 1777), 20, quoted in Clive M. Norris, *Financing*, 183-84.

<sup>94</sup> Wesley, July 21, 1773, *Journals and Diaries V (1765-1775)*, in *Works*, 22:384. Rogal argues that Wesley's debt had several causes, including a total disregard for money, his trust that people would contribute to Methodist causes, his impatience to respond to the needs around him, and his need to be in debt so that he could not be accused of lining his pockets. All of this resulted in his building the organization with the one hand, while begging for money with the other. Rogal, *The Financial Aspects*, 30-31.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* Wesley was well aware of the danger of too much debt. The large debt of the Moravians in England, which had accumulated to £ 132,000, reflected negatively on the Moravian work, and caused Whitefield and Wesley great concern. See Clive M. Norris, *Financing*, 172. To protect himself against accusations of having married Molly for her money, he even made legal provisions for her and her children. See Rogal, *The Financial Aspects*, 30-31.

Whether the reasons for Wesley's debts were conscious or not, the business side of his organization was in tension with his compassionate heart and generosity.

In Wesley's life and work, the spiritual meaning attached to money weighed heavier than any temporal concern. Nevertheless, he did not downplay the reality of financial hardship, the temptation of riches, the falsehood of basing happiness in money, or the cruel consequences of seeking security in mammon instead of God. Rather, he promoted a commonsense approach of moderation with respect to money, while encouraging his people to earn, save, and give all they could. As to the poor, he treated them as "those whom God has chosen."<sup>96</sup>

### *Summary*

The experience of poverty in his own life and the lives of many of the Methodists informed Wesley's thinking about handling money, in accordance with biblical principles. Wesley's core view was that Christians are stewards of what God provides. All Methodists were, in a way, indigents who lived by God's grace, sharing what they could with others. The actuality of having too little or too much money—and how that influenced one's spiritual state—confirmed and informed Wesley's beliefs in the rightful place of dealing with money as God's provision—in temperance for Christians and their families, with any surplus to be given as alms.

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<sup>96</sup> Wesley's commentary on James 2:5 says, "*Hath not God chosen the poor*—That is, are not they whom God hath chosen, generally speaking, poor in this world? who yet are rich in faith, *and heirs of the kingdom*—Consequently, the most honorable of men: and those whom God so highly honors, ought not ye to honor likewise?" *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, 625 (emphasis in original, indicating the Bible text).

### Practice-laden Beliefs and Belief-laden Practices

Wesley rubbed shoulders with the poor when they were at their lowest, in health and in finances. These existential realities of the eighteenth century compelled Wesley to act on his belief that Christians were called to take care of the sick and the poor, in obedience to Christ's instructions. The congruence of beliefs and practices remained a pattern throughout Wesley's life. In order to argue this, I assessed two examples of Wesley's stated beliefs: *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, a defense by Wesley of his theology, in which he consistently accompanied faith with actions; and *Discourses IV-IX* of the series "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount," a representative sample of Wesley's sermons, especially emphasizing the need for outward actions flowing out of faith. Wesley's intended his espoused theology to be expressed in his operant theology.

I then examined two examples of Wesley's practices: his medical work and his finances. Both of those areas of activity were complex, as Wesley adapted these long-term practices when circumstances demanded. They were also deeply grounded in Wesley's beliefs, and sustained by his reading of the Bible and his life experiences. His operant theology was consonant with his espoused theology. How Wesley lived his life, exhorted others to live, and gave leadership to his organisation, was not just based in his theology; it *was* his theology.

Wesley was by no means without his faults. Nevertheless, a sampling of his practice-laden beliefs and his belief-laden practices indicates how the Christian life he lived followed the Christian life he believed God had made possible in Christ. According to Cahalan and Nieman, practical theology is "a particular faith" that is manifested

“through concrete ways of life.”<sup>97</sup> In that context, the intricate connection of Wesley’s espoused and operant theology can rightfully be called a practical theology.

Having argued that Wesley’s theology is indeed a practical theology, I can now highlight the aesthetic features that become visible when examining the close connection of Wesley’s faith and concrete ways of life. The aesthetic character of Wesley’s practical theology then propels the argument towards an aesthetic approach to Christian education in order to bring the espoused and operant theologies of Nazarenes closer together.

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<sup>97</sup> Kathleen A. Cahalan and James R. Nieman, “Mapping the Field of Practical Theology,” in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids, MI, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 67.

## CHAPTER 3

### WESLEY'S AESTHETIC PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

In this chapter, I develop a new concept of theological aesthetics, engaged aesthetics, which will be a fruitful notion for deciding if and how John Wesley's practical theology was aesthetic.<sup>1</sup> The term "engaged aesthetics" indicates the importance of engaging the body and the imagination, and of reflecting theologically on one's own and others' experiences. Engaged aesthetics can address life more comprehensively than can purely intellectual theology, by engaging five aspects of aesthetics that I will explore. After a short history of aesthetics, I present the five elements of theological aesthetics and aesthetic theory that form the core of engaged aesthetics.

#### What is aesthetics?

Histories of aesthetics refer to Greek antiquity as the period in which Western philosophical thinking and writing about beauty and art originated.<sup>2</sup> Plato's writings on art and beauty are still influential today. He defined terms and described issues such as the connection of art to craft (*τέχνη*), art as imitation (*μίμησις*), the function of art, and the transcendentals—Truth, Goodness, and Beauty—as the highest virtues. Plato understood

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<sup>1</sup> I am exclusively treating the Western history of the philosophy of art and of beauty, not because the history of non-Western aesthetics is uninteresting or unimportant, but because of my focus on John Wesley in England and the Church of the Nazarene in North America.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1975), 23-26; George Dickie and R.J. Sclafani, eds., *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), 6; Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, vol. 1: *Ancient Aesthetics* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), 9-10; Katherine Everett Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn, *A History of Esthetics*, rev. ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1953), 1-18.

beauty broadly; with Socrates, he viewed beauty as “suitability” and, with the Sophists, as “pleasure for the eyes and ears.”<sup>3</sup> Following the Pythagoreans, beauty for Plato had its foundation in proportion, balance, measure, order and harmony.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Plato measured the beauty of things to the degree it conformed with the Idea of Beauty, an attribute of Reality and inspired by the gods. Beauty was not solely characterized by experience, but rather by philosophizing, thereby including the soul and abstract ideas as beautiful. The arts in Plato’s time could not carry his approval. He considered them neither morally useful, nor true. Painting, poetry, and music did not fit Plato’s criteria for beauty; they were frivolous, false, and misleading because they deviated from the perfect Ideal.

Aristotle treated aesthetics differently. He based his ideas on the work of philosophers, but also on artists. Tatarkiewicz states, “Whereas Plato condemned art and poetry because they did not fit in his ideology, Aristotle adapted his aesthetics to the established practice.”<sup>5</sup> Salient features of Aristotle’s aesthetics are his emphasis on art, *τέχνη*, as human activity, and his insistence that art is both *knowledge* about the rules of production, and the *production* of the artifact.<sup>6</sup> Whereas Plato considered the mimetic character of the arts as negative, for Aristotle, dramaturges, actors, and poets could surpass the representation of reality and imbue art with their personal expressions.

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<sup>3</sup> Tatarkiewicz, 112-27.

<sup>4</sup> Beardsley, 42-43; Tatarkiewicz, 116-17.

<sup>5</sup> Tatarkiewicz, 139.

<sup>6</sup> To refer to art as the product is a modern understanding of the later Latin term, *ars*.

Aristotle, in contrast to Plato, considered the arts to be autonomous, both morally and virtuously, as they included both artistic truth and cognitive truth.<sup>7</sup> While Plato considered the arts misleading because of their draw at our feelings, to Aristotle the arts could function as a vicarious experience of emotions. Aristotle's conditions for beauty were rooted in Plato, but he emphasized that something of beauty must be suitable to "the capacity of senses, imagination and memory."<sup>8</sup> The phrase *nihil in intellectu nisi prius in sensu* is representative of Aristotle's thought.<sup>9</sup>

In subsequent centuries, philosophers, theologians, historians and artists interpreted and expanded upon the theories of Plato and Aristotle. The study of art and beauty contains many aspects: objective and subjective aesthetics, psychological and sociological aesthetics, descriptive and prescriptive aesthetics, aesthetic theory and aesthetic politics, aesthetic facts and aesthetic explanation, philosophical and particular aesthetics (i.e. written by artists), aesthetics of the arts ("direct" and "sensuous" art) and aesthetics of literature ("intellectual" and "symbolic" art).<sup>10</sup> Concepts of aesthetics reached their enduring form in the Renaissance with the revival of classical art.

### **Contemporary theological aesthetics**

Tatarkiewicz ended his three-volume work on the history of aesthetics in the

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<sup>7</sup> Tatarkiewicz, 146-49.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>9</sup> "There is nothing in the understanding, that was not first in the senses."

<sup>10</sup> Tatarkiewicz, 1-4.

1700s, claiming that, since that time, classical aesthetics required no major redefining, because it “contained within itself a considerable capacity for adaptation, expansion and development.”<sup>11</sup> Although not seismic, several gradual changes transformed classical aesthetics into modern aesthetics. Aesthetics after the 1700s included the idea, for instance, that besides harmony, tension and contrasts can also be pleasing; or that beautiful things can appeal to the emotions or the imagination and not only to reason.<sup>12</sup>

Contemporary understanding of aesthetics owes much to Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, an eighteenth century German philosopher, who used the concept of aesthetics in a new way. The word “aesthetics” derives from the Greek αἴσθησις, which means “perception by the senses.”<sup>13</sup> Baumgarten, however, understood aesthetics in an epistemological way, changing its meaning from “sensation” to the “science of sensory cognition.”<sup>14</sup> He developed a theory of the art of thinking beautifully, which he also called the art of forming taste.<sup>15</sup> Baumgarten elevated the “science” of the senses, with its own intelligence of imagination and intuition, from the lowly place it held in comparison

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<sup>11</sup> Tatarkiewicz, 454, 456.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 455-56.

<sup>13</sup> “αἴσθησις” in Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (New York: Follett, 1956), 21.

<sup>14</sup> Already in 1735, in *Meditationes Philosophicae de Nonnules Ad Poema Pertinentibus*, § 116 [copy of latin text in screen shot folder of Surface], Baumgarten mentioned the nucleus of his theory of aesthetics, but he developed it more fully in his *Aesthetica* (the first volume was published in 1750, the next in 1758, the rest remained unfinished). See Dagmar Mirbach, “Einführung” [Introduction], in Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Metaphysik* (Jena: Dietrich Scheglmann Reprints, 2004), x. Some authors pointing to the start of modern aesthetics refer to the early date of 1735, such as Alejandro García-Rivera in *The Community of the Beautiful: A Theological Aesthetics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 9; others mention the later date of 1750, such as Richard Viladesau in *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty and Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 6.

<sup>15</sup> See Viladesau, 6.

with the higher realm of rational thinking. Subsequent Enlightenment thinkers adopted Baumgarten's theory, with the unfortunate consequence that aesthetics became separated from logic, ethics, and theology.<sup>16</sup> This development presupposed another partition, namely a Cartesian separation between the mind (or spirit) and body.<sup>17</sup> The work of aesthetic theologians in the twentieth and twenty-first century can be characterized by the efforts to bring aesthetics back to a broader, holistic meaning which includes its religious and theological aspects. Most of these aesthetic theologians have a specific point of view, or emphasis in their work. I will draw from several theorists in developing a constellation of engaged aesthetics that serves to reflect more holistically on theology.

### **Theological Aesthetics**

Theological aesthetics has been approached in many ways. Richard Viladesau, for instance, distinguishes four dimensions of theological aesthetics:

1. *Theological Aesthetics as Practice*: by virtue of its subject, theological studies should bring beauty and joy to the theologian.<sup>18</sup>
2. *The Aesthetic as a Source for Theology*: the aesthetic provides experience – sense data – about God, religion and theology itself.<sup>19</sup>
3. *Theology as Metaphor and as Metaphysics*: in which realm aesthetics provides

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 15.

the language.<sup>20</sup>

4. *Theological Aesthetics as Theory*: aesthetics as imagination and revelation, a theology of beauty and a theological reflection on the arts.<sup>21</sup>

Kenton Stiles lays out four categories of intersection between theology and art:<sup>22</sup>

1. *Theology and the arts*: any interaction of theology and aesthetics, art history, art making, art theory, art criticism.
2. *Doctrinal theological aesthetics*: doctrines, such as creation, incarnation, Christology, that can be “explored in terms of aesthetics/the aesthetic.”
3. *Fundamental theological aesthetics*: a systematic theology developed through the aesthetic.
4. *Aesthetic theology*: refers to theology in creative expressions, e.g. music, homiletics, liturgy.

The two lists do not exactly overlap. This is an indication of, on the one hand, the fluidity of the still young field of theological aesthetics and, on the other hand, the complexity of this field and possibility of multiple approaches in this area.

### Wesley’s Theological Aesthetics

For my purposes, Stiles’ categorization will prove most helpful, as I explain in what way Wesley’s theology can be considered an aesthetic theology.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>22</sup> Kenton Stiles, “Theological Aesthetics: A Wesleyan Sampling of Cuisine,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 45, no. 1. (2007): 170n17, although not in the order I cite.

*Ad 1. Theology and the arts.* Wesley never purposefully sets out to interpret art in a theological way. For him, the enjoyment of the arts should never supplant or overshadow the real joy of life, which is to know Christ and make him known. This is clear from the tension in Wesley's own comments on pleasing aesthetic experiences.<sup>23</sup> He devalued aesthetic experiences, not because of any innate characteristic of the arts, but because the satisfaction received through the experience should not supplant the desire for the divine, and thus lead to idolatry.

One could argue that the poetry and hymns of both John and Charles Wesley fall into the category of art interpreted theologically.<sup>24</sup> The hymns were exceptional aids to conversion and catechesis of new believers. The Wesleys' poetic arts were so powerful because "[the hymns] brought back lyricism in praise and gave a place to the religious affections in an age of rationalism and formalism."<sup>25</sup> John, however, valued Charles's literary talent for its service to the gospel. John recognized "the artistic ability but [set] it second to salvation."<sup>26</sup> He wrote in the eulogy for Charles, "His least praise was his talent for poetry."<sup>27</sup> John's evangelistic concern and his practicality in feeding his flock with

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<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, Wesley, July 21, 1765, *Journals and Diaries V (1765-1775)*, in *Works*, 22:15.

<sup>24</sup> See Randy Maddox' work on the hymns and poetry of John and Charles, accessed January 2, 2018, <https://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives/cswt/john-wesley>.

<sup>25</sup> From Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England: From Watts and Wesley to Martineau, 1690-1900*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 235, quoted in Julia Frances Roat-Abla, "Beauty and Holiness: Wesleyan Theology as the Context and Principle for Aesthetic Insight" (MA thesis, Nazarene Theological Seminary, 2004), 17.

<sup>26</sup> Roat-Abla, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Wesley, *Annual Minutes and Conference Journal*, 1788, in *The Methodist Societies: The Minutes of Conference*, ed. Henry D. Rack, vol. 10 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 10:646, hereafter cited as *Works*.

good spiritual nourishment prevailed over any aesthetic consideration. Wesley did not articulate a theological approach to aesthetics. However, in light of his writings on taste, we might conclude that beauty is part of the realm of human experiences and part of the holy life when enjoyed “in virtue, in gratitude, and in disinterested benevolence.”<sup>28</sup> This synopsis gives space for the inclusion of the aesthetic within the fullness of Christian perfection.

*Ad 2. and 3. Doctrinal theological aesthetics and Fundamental theological aesthetics.* Wesley’s theology was not systematic but focused on Christian living. He did not set out to theologize about the philosophy of aesthetics, or develop one doctrine or his whole theology on aesthetic terms. However, this does not mean that Wesley was ignorant of aesthetic philosophy.

The eighteenth century saw a lively debate on the topic of taste and beauty, often linked to ethics, in which three main streams of thought can be distinguished. The internal sense theory was represented by Bernard de Mandeville, Francis Hutcheson, and Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury. The locus of original Beauty is in the divine mind and can be perceived only rationally and disinterestedly, through the internal sense.<sup>29</sup> That which is experienced through the external senses by the human mind points to beauty that represents the designer’s mind, who’s mind in turn is designed by the

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<sup>28</sup> Wesley, “Thoughts upon Taste,” §10, vol. 13 of *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 13:468, hereafter cited as *Works* (Jackson).

<sup>29</sup> “Shaftesbury Aesthetics and Moral Philosophy,” The Forum at the Online Library of Liberty, accessed March 27, 2013, <http://oll.libertyfund.org/pages/shaftesbury-s-aesthetics-moral-philosophy?q=Shaftesbury#>; “Hutcheson and the Passions,” *ibid.*, accessed March 27, 2013, [http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=684&Itemid=286](http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=684&Itemid=286).

divine mind. The imagination theory, promulgated by Joseph Addison and Edmund Burke, held that the pleasure of taste was located in the imagination. Beauty exists as an idea only, dependent on who perceived what. This theory was relative and idealistic, against the absolute and realistic internal sense theory. The association theory of aesthetics, which bridged the internal sense and the imagination theories, was promulgated by Alexander Gerard.<sup>30</sup> Gerard agreed with Hutcheson that the human sense of beauty is internal, but the imagination and memories help the perception of beauty by way of association of ideas.

Wesley was well aware of the debate, had read many of the writings and, characteristically, had made up his own mind on the place and value of aesthetics. In fact, the lack of engagement with this debate in his own theological writings gives an important clue to his thinking. At the same time, we can find resonances of the ongoing discussion throughout Wesley's sermons, journals, and publishing.

In a *Journal* entry of 14 April 1756, Wesley commented scathingly on Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees*.<sup>31</sup> He had read and commented on Shaftesbury's *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times*; he was well acquainted with Hutcheson's work, which he considered dangerous, and he had read Reid's *Essay on the*

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<sup>30</sup> James Shelly, "Gerard," 18<sup>th</sup> Century British Aesthetics in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed March 26, 2013, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetics-18th-british/>.

<sup>31</sup> "I looked over a celebrated book, *The Fable of the Bees*. Till now I imagined there had never appeared in the world such a book as the works of Machiavel. But Dr. Mandeville goes far beyond it. ... [He] loves and cordially recommends vice of every kind; not only as useful now and then, but as absolutely necessary at all times for all communities!" Wesley, April 14, 1756, *Journals and Diaries IV (1755-1765)*, in *Works*, 21:510 (emphasis in original).

*Mind*.<sup>32</sup> From his comments, it is clear that Wesley did not agree with the moral implications of the internal-sense theories.

Wesley was a regular reader of *The Spectator*, in which Addison's essays were published, as well as other publications by Addison.<sup>33</sup> There is also some evidence that Wesley knew Burke's work. He read Gerard's essay on taste in 1779, and he was not impressed.<sup>34</sup> Wesley responded to it with his own essay, which incorporated views of Hutcheson, Addison, Burke and Gerard.<sup>35</sup>

In "Thoughts Upon Taste," Wesley first gave his own definition of taste,

[Taste] is certainly a faculty of the mind, analogous to the sense of taste. By the external sense we relish various foods, and distinguish one from the other. By the internal, we relish and distinguish various foods offered to the mind. Taste is therefore that internal sense which relishes [i.e. perceives with pleasure] and

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<sup>32</sup> Wesley referred to Hutcheson four times in sermons 90, 105, 114, 123, and once in a letter to William Dodd on March 12, 1756, *Letters III*, in *Works*, 27:22¶5-6. In his 1785 sermon "An Israelite Indeed" Wesley concluded Mr. Hutcheson's "beautiful essay" to be "decent, and therefore more dangerous, attack upon the whole of Christian Revelation." See sermon 90, "An Israelite Indeed," § 2, in *Works*, 3:279. In the Kingswood School copy of Hutcheson's *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, Wesley had inscribed, "J.W. 1772" "A panegyric upon Mankind, pity but it were true!" See Randy Maddox, "Kingswood School Library Holdings (ca. 1775)," *Methodist History* 41, no. 1 (2002): 356. Wesley clearly deplored the overly optimistic view of humankind that Hutcheson employs. For Wesley's familiarity with Reid, see G.F. Playter, "Wesley As A Man of Literature," *The Methodist Quarterly Review* 40, (April 1858): 272.

<sup>33</sup> See his early diaries, for instance, Nehemiah Curnock, "Introductory," in *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock, vol. 1 (London: Epworth Press, 1938), 22, 59, 70. For evidence that Wesley had read Addison's *The Works of the Right Honourable Joseph Addison*, and his *Notes upon the Twelve Books of "Paradise Lost,"* see Randy L. Maddox, "John Wesley's Reading: Evidence in the Kingswood School Archives," *Methodist History* 41, no. 2 (2003): 60.

<sup>34</sup> Wesley comments, "And is this the treatise that gained the premium? It is lively and pretty; but neither deep nor strong. Scarce any of the terms are accurately defined. Indeed, defining is not this author's talent. He has not by any means a clear apprehension; and it is through this capital defect, that he jumbles together true and false propositions, in every chapter and in every page." Wesley, 24 March 1779, *Journals and Diaries VI (1776-1786)*, in *Works*, 23:120. Wesley read a new edition that had just come out. See Peter Forsaith, *Image, Identity and John Wesley: A Study in Portraiture* (London: Routledge, 2017), 83.

<sup>35</sup> Stiles, "Theological Aesthetics," 165-66. See Wesley, "Thoughts Upon Taste," §§1-3, in *Works*, (Jackson), 13:465-66.

distinguishes its proper object.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, Wesley makes his own distinction between the external senses as purely physical and the internal senses as solely mental. His division is simple, and even simplistic: pleasure comes either from the mind or from the body.

As Wesley continued to expound on taste, it became clear that the issue was more complex than a mere dualism between mind and body. He recognized that he was dealing with a matter of audience. Especially his use of analogy to explain taste as a faculty of the mind similar to the taste of the tongue, hints by its simplification at a desire to make a complex and convoluted philosophical idea understandable.<sup>37</sup> His goal was not just the increase of knowledge, but—as will be clear from the rest of his essay—personal improvement for his readers. In the next few paragraphs, Wesley outlined four kinds of [aesthetic] taste, depending on the objects under observation:

1. a taste for “objects of understanding,” such as metaphysics or mathematics, in which case taste includes not only being capable of understanding the topic, but also finding pleasure in its study.<sup>38</sup>
2. a taste for objects “that gratify the imagination,” be it a taste “for grandeur, for novelty, or for beauty.”<sup>39</sup> Here Wesley emphasizes that there is a great variety in

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<sup>36</sup> Wesley, “Thoughts upon Taste,” §6, 13:466.

<sup>37</sup> His use of this metaphor also harkens back to a Platonic analogy of natural senses and spiritual senses. See John C. English, “John Wesley’s indebtedness to John Norris,” *Church History* 60, no. 1 (March 1991): 59.

<sup>38</sup> Wesley, “Thoughts upon Taste,” §7, in *Works* (Jackson), 13:466.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, §8, 13:467.

this kind of taste: some like grandeur, others like novelty or beauty; some like beauty in art, others in nature, some have a taste for both.

3. a taste for “the happiness of our fellow-creatures ... (whether by nature, or from a higher principle),” which Wesley considers to be part of human nature “in many, if not in all.”<sup>40</sup>
4. a taste for “the beauty in virtue, in gratitude, and disinterested [i.e. not self-focused] benevolence,” which Wesley extolled above the other kinds of taste as infinitely more valuable and an infinitely more delicate pleasure.<sup>41</sup>

After arguing that everyone has some degree of internal taste, Wesley defended the need for “fine taste.” Although Addison restricted fine taste to “the beauties of writing,” Wesley asked, “Should it not rather be [that faculty of mind] ‘which discerns all that is grand or beautiful, in the works both of art and nature?’”<sup>42</sup> Finally, Wesley told his readers that

Such a taste as this is much to be desired, and that on many accounts. It greatly increases those pleasures of life, which are not only innocent, but useful. It qualifies us to be of far greater service to our fellow-creatures. It is more especially desirable for those whose profession calls them to converse with many; seeing it enables them to be more agreeable, and consequently more profitable, in conversation.<sup>43</sup>

Wesley’s essay differed from the aesthetes in several ways. His four categories of taste were new. He made distinctions, not on the basis of the location or perception of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., §9, 13:467.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., §10, 13:467.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., §13, 13:468.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., §14, 13:468-9.

beauty, but on the basis of the objects of perception: first, ideas; second, representations in the imagination (of art objects or nature); third, specific human beings; fourth, humankind and society in general. He did not speculate about the idealist or rational character of beauty, nor did he discuss beauty over against sublimity. Although Wesley—with Hutcheson—included virtue and benevolence, it was separated from the happiness of others, since it was the love of God which bestowed virtue and benevolence, something overlooked by Hutcheson.<sup>44</sup> And lastly, Wesley did not differentiate between the various sources of pleasure in the way the philosophers did.<sup>45</sup> This taste may, to some degree, be inborn, but it can be acquired and improved by reading “the writings of the best authors,” and by “conversation with men of genius.”<sup>46</sup> By doing so, “we may learn to correct whatever is yet amiss in our taste, as well as to supply whatever we or they perceive to be still wanting, all which may be directed to that glorious end, the ‘pleasing all men for their good unto edification.’”<sup>47</sup> In his treatment of aesthetics, Wesley was guided, as in the other areas of life, by his evangelical concerns.

*Ad 4. Aesthetic theology.* Although Wesley never consciously set out to “do theology aesthetically,” this is exactly his contribution to theological aesthetics. Wesley practiced his theology—espoused and operant—in a way that is beautiful. However, here

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<sup>44</sup> Wesley, sermon 90, “An Israelite Indeed,” §1-2, in *Works*, 3:279.

<sup>45</sup> It could possibly be said that Wesley took Gerard’s example in the neutrality on “the question of the primacy of the intellectual or the material with respect to objects of taste,” and extended it to a neutrality on the processes by which perception of beauty took place.

<sup>46</sup> Wesley, “Thoughts upon Taste,” §16-17, 13:469.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, §17, 13:469.

“beautiful” does not mean pleasing to the senses, but it is rather a kind of aesthetic beauty that is expressed in virtue, gratitude, and selfless benevolence, inspired by the love of God. In order to make this argument, I will develop a new approach to theological aesthetics, namely engaged (theological) aesthetics. With that new lens, it will be possible to see how Wesley’s practical theology was an aesthetic practical theology.

### **Engaged (Theological) Aesthetics**

For the purpose of this dissertation, I will consider five elements from (theological) aesthetics and aesthetic theory that are most helpful for an engaged aesthetic: embodiment, form-giving, foregrounding, paying attention, and holding in tension. In the rest of the chapter I lay the foundation for the kind of aesthetic Christian education that has the potential of addressing discrepancies between people’s espoused and operant theology. I will first explain the concepts of the elements of engaged aesthetic, and then examine how these concepts resonate in Wesley’s practical theology.

#### Embodiment

The first aspect, *embodiment*, points to the important role of the body in the formation of meaning and to the holistic nature of beauty and art, as they have the power to involve not only the mind but all of a person. Additionally—although not treated in this section—embodiment underscores the *materiality* of beauty and art. Embodiment is common in writings about aesthetics and art, but James A.K. Smith gives embodiment especial attention in relation to theology. Smith, a Reformed philosopher, develops an aesthetic anthropology in which human beings are “*affective* animals whose worlds are

made more by the imagination than by the intellect—... humans are those desiring creatures who live off of stories, narrative, images, and the stuff of *poiesis*.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, human beings cannot *not* worship and those worship practices fundamentally form humans into who humans are.

Drawing on the work of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty and social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, Smith builds an argument for the role of the body in Christian formation: first to recognize that we are always being formed to worship something through the imagination of the body; and second to resist a secular formation and attend to a Christian formation.<sup>49</sup> Smith considers liturgy as “a synonym for *worship*.” He claims, “that liturgies—whether ‘sacred’ or ‘secular’—shape and constitute our identities by forming our most fundamental desires and our most basic attunement to the world.”<sup>50</sup> Smith is concerned then with the central role of formative practices, whether they be secular or Christian. The kind of worship, or liturgy, we engage in will determine what we love or desire, and the kind of person we will be. The formation will be radically different depending on the practices we inhabit in the body.<sup>51</sup>

The work of Smith helps us understand not only the importance of the body *per se*, but the deep theological implications of fleshly existence and the possibilities for

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<sup>48</sup> James K.A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), xii (emphasis in original). Smith developed his aesthetic anthropology (although he does not use this term) in the book *Desiring the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

<sup>49</sup> Smith, *Imagining*, 19-20.

<sup>50</sup> Smith developed his definition of liturgy in *Desiring*, 25, 25n8 (emphasis in original).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

personal and communal transformation these implications carry. One concept presents itself as particularly fruitful for this dissertation, namely that human bodies are one hundred percent involved in why, what, and how people worship. Human beings worship what they love; human beings worship because they love.<sup>52</sup> The emotions of love and desire are regulated—among other factors—by the limbic system; therefore, the body plays an important, although subconscious, role in *why* people worship.<sup>53</sup> *What* humans truly worship is borne out by what they actually love with and in their bodies—through physical actions and the emotions—rather than by what they say or believe. Likewise, *how* people worship is expressed in bodily habits and gestures. A growing awareness of the corporeality of Christian worship should also bring about the realization that it is not possible *not* to worship. When believers are not engaged in intentional Christian liturgy, they are performing liturgy secularly. Intentionality, awareness and reflection on the connections between body and worship are necessary for people to be consistent in belief and action.

### Form-giving

The second element, *form-giving*, concerns the shaping of concepts and beliefs into concrete forms, habits and actions. The eminent example of form-giving in

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<sup>52</sup> Smith does not include fear as a motivator for worship since he considers desire to be the driving force for faith. See “‘I Am What I Love’: The Human Person a Lover,” in *Desiring*, 46-63. However, since fear is also regulated by the limbic system, worship out of fear also has its basis in the body, just as the relation to the objects and the habits of that worship are expressed bodily.

<sup>53</sup> For research on the limbic system and religiosity, see, for instance, Michael R. Trimble, *The Soul in the Brain: The Cerebral Basis of Language, Art, and Belief* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2007), 162, 170-73.

theological aesthetics is the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, as the embodied image, *εἰκών*, of God. The Swiss Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar developed his aesthetic theology in reaction to the dry and lifeless neo-scholastic theology he studied as a Jesuit: “My entire period of study in the Society was a grim struggle with the dreariness of theology, with what men had made out of the glory of revelation.”<sup>54</sup> It is exactly this glory that von Balthasar highlights in his multi-volume trilogy *The Glory of the Lord*. In order to recast theology as the glory it reveals, von Balthasar approaches theological and biblical concepts from the aesthetic perspective. Central to his work is the revelation of God’s glory through God the Son. As the Word, Christ is the “exegesis” of God the Father; Christ is, in the words of Bonaventura, “the very language of the Father.”<sup>55</sup> Through the Word we can *hear* the glory of God; and since the Word became flesh in the Incarnation, we can also *see* the form of God. The Christian life, then, exists in revealing who God is:

To be a Christian is precisely a form. How could it be otherwise, since being a Christian is a grace, a possibility of existence opened up to us by God's active justification, by their God-Man's act of redemption? This is not the formless, general possibility of an alleged freedom, but the exact possibility, appointed by God for every individual in his existence as a member of Christ's body, in his task within the body, in his mission, his charism, his Christian service to the church and to the world. Considered in all its dimensions, what could be more holistic, indissoluble, and at the same time more clearly contoured than this form of being

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<sup>54</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Einleitung,” in A. von Speyr, *Erde und Himmel, Ein Tagebuch. Zweiter Teil, II: Die Zeit der grossen Diktate* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1975), 195, quoted in Aidan Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad: A Guide Through Balthasar's Aesthetics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), xii.

<sup>55</sup> Peter J. Casarella, “The Expression and Form of the Word: Trinitarian Hermeneutics and the Sacramentality of Language in Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theology,” in *Glory, Grace, and Culture: The Works of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Ed Block, Jr. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005), 37.

a Christian?<sup>56</sup>

In von Balthasar, the form of Christ, seeing the form of Christ and becoming the form of Christ for others to see, are all inextricably linked parts of the revelation of God's glory.

Faith is strongly connected to knowledge, for von Balthasar; not as a disembodied knowing, but an intimate, embodied knowing of God in the Old Testament sense of spiritual-physical intimacy between a man and a woman.<sup>57</sup> Faith is a response of the *whole human being* to God's revelation; it is the experience of meeting God in body and soul.<sup>58</sup> Von Balthasar's aesthetic approach of theology provides an analogy of the faith experience of encountering Christ and the aesthetic experience of encountering an artwork.<sup>59</sup> In light of Paul's frequent use of the term "in Christ," von Balthasar presents the life of a Christian as incorporation into the form of Christ; it is a "shaping" (Gal. 4:19) in which Christ becomes increasingly visible to others around the believer.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, the aesthetic experience is a process of "incorporation" and "transformation" as the power of the artwork first displaces the viewer from his or her usual point of view and then takes up space in the viewer's interiority in such a way that the viewer is

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<sup>56</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, vol. 1 of *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1961), 27.

<sup>57</sup> See von Balthasar, "Pistis and Gnosis," in *Seeing the Form*, 127-37; also in Yves de Maeseneer, "Geloven in de eenentwintigste eeuw. Een perspectief vanuit de theologische esthetica van Hans Urs von Balthasar," ["Faith in the Twenty-first Century: A Perspective in the Wake of Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics"] *Collationes: Vlaams tijdschrift voor theology and pastoraal* 38, no. 4 (2008): 366. For the Old Testament "knowing," see, for instance, Genesis 4:1, "And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived" (KJV).

<sup>58</sup> De Maeseneer, "Geloven," 366 (De Maeseneer emphasized "de mens *als geheel*").

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 368-69.

<sup>60</sup> Von Balthasar, "The Experience of Faith" in *Seeing the Form*, 218.

subjected to the artwork's power and is changed by it.<sup>61</sup> The one indispensable requirement of the subject is a "fundamental receptivity."<sup>62</sup> Von Balthasar describes this attitude for the theological aesthetic experience as "a readiness for and an openness to another form which actively approaches us from the side of God."<sup>63</sup>

Von Balthasar's work is extensive and complex; for the argument of this chapter, I only concentrate on a synopsis of the concept of form-giving. In this condensed treatment, especially poignant is that God's revelation of God-self in the incarnate Christ is an aesthetic, full-bodied event. A deep understanding and reception of the materiality of God-in-Christ is inextricably linked to the knowing of God, in and through embodied practices and actions. These are practices in the context of the worship service, e.g. folding hands and closing eyes in prayer, extending open hands to receive the benediction, kneeling to receive communion; but also actions that express faith in God and praise to God in service to others, from curbing one's tongue to feeding the homeless and marching in protest of social injustice. In summary, "it is clear that Balthasar's understanding of human existence is a direct reflection of his meditation on Christ. It is Jesus' own life that irradiates the authentic features of humanity's form of being."<sup>64</sup> As the incarnate Christ was the visible form of God, so Christians are to be the visible form of Christ. As we will see in chapter 5, form-giving—based on similar incarnational

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<sup>61</sup> De Maeseneer, "Geloven," 269.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>63</sup> Von Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 235.

<sup>64</sup> Mark A. McIntosh, "Christology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 34.

assumptions—is also an important category in the literature of aesthetic religious education, particularly through the work of Maria Harris.

### Foregrounding

The third element, *foregrounding*, indicates the activity of the spiritual senses, as they guide the imagination of the heart. In that spiritual, affective, and moral center, the imagination participates in the biblical paradox, characterized by Jesus, of the first being the last, and the last being first. It parallels the art-viewing movement of focusing on something in the background that is normally overlooked: the Spirit draws one to pay attention to people at the periphery. Alejandro García-Rivera develops the concept of foregrounding in his theological aesthetics, *The Community of the Beautiful*, as a contribution from the Latin-American church. He asks the central question, “What moves the human heart?” García-Rivera takes von Balthasar’s process from “seeing” with the senses to the intellectual activity of apprehending “form,” and attributes the process to the imagination, which is “the prime mover and movement of the human heart.”<sup>65</sup> Von Balthasar describes the reconciliation of God and human beings through the aesthetic of seeing the form; García-Rivera shifts the emphasis from seeing “form” to seeing “difference,” namely the differences between people. Once this difference is acknowledged, the work of reconciliation between people can take place.

García-Rivera’s theological aesthetics expresses the seeing of difference through

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<sup>65</sup> García-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful*, 24. Von Balthasar preferred ‘bowels’ in order to avoid the conflation of “the heart” with the Platonic “soul.” See de Maeseneer, “Geloven,” 366.

the act of “lifting up” certain elements or people that are normally in the background, thereby “foregrounding” them and elevating them in value.<sup>66</sup> This is the work of the imagination in the heart and it forms the basis of García-Rivera’s aesthetic principle, as expressed in Mary’s words “[God] has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly” (Luke 1:52). The act of lifting up the lowly, or foregrounding, expresses the way “God’s Beauty embodies itself.”<sup>67</sup>

Seeing and valuing people who are in the background is also the theme of Roberto Goizueta’s work. He sees the beauty of the incarnational life of God-with-us in the way Christians embody the life of the church daily. Since the very essence of Christianity is the embodied and incarnate form of the crucified and risen Christ, the everyday faith of the weak and the wounded consists of acts of solidarity with the wounded Christ.<sup>68</sup> *Theology* is mediated through *theopraxis*, and the participatory aspect of the faith of the people constitutes the aesthetic element of that praxis.<sup>69</sup> And as Christ himself lived much of his life in obscurity and on the margin, so too God is found in and among the people of the margin. The acts of their daily faith then become a rich and aesthetic source of theology.

I want to highlight two characteristics of García-Rivera and Goizueta’s

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<sup>66</sup> García-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful*, 167.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>68</sup> Roberto S. Goizueta, *Christ our Companion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 23.

<sup>69</sup> See Roberto S. Goizueta “Practicing Beauty: Aesthetic Praxis, Justice, and U.S. Latino/a Popular Religion,” in *Invitation to Practical Theology: Catholic Voices and Visions*, ed. Claire E. Wolfteich (New York: Paulist Press, 2014), 149-167.

contributions. First, the imagination plays an important role in theological aesthetics, as it entails a newness of seeing, of interacting, and of valuing. The holistic process of meaning-making supports the U.S. Latinex hermeneutic of grounding theology in daily, embodied life, since faith and theological reflection can only make sense as they are connected to the other elements of living. Furthermore, a new way of seeing means paying attention to people who are at the periphery of society and are therefore often unseen. Foregrounding entails a willingness to see and a re-evaluation of what is now lifted up.

Second, the aesthetic movement of truly seeing and being moved (away from one's center) by what is seen, has consequences. Seeing must involve acting on what is now seen. García-Rivera and Goizueta challenge the Christian vision to commit fully to the empowerment and liberation of the poor and oppressed. Although not every community of faith will include U.S. Latinex marginalized people, every community of faith includes and is surrounded by people who are in the background: other ethnicities, other-gendered people, disabled people, people in different socio-economic classes, etc. The aesthetic move of foregrounding is necessary in order to see God in the differences among people, and then to act on behalf of those who are different.

### Paying Attention

The fourth element of engaged aesthetics is *paying attention*. All connotations of aesthetics—the philosophy of beauty, the study of art, or the theory of meaning-making—imply the need for attentiveness beyond the cursory glance that suffices for

everyday perception. Paying attention indicates that, if people would take the time to reflect on what is before them, some knowledge may be discovered: a feeling, a memory, an insight in the ‘why’ or ‘how’ of some conundrum, connections to other experiences, and perhaps, new meaning out of all of these components.

In *Religious Aesthetics: A Theological Study of Making and Meaning*, Frank Burch Brown relates aesthetics to religion through reflective seeing. Burch Brown rejects the aesthetic theories which categorize experiences as either “aesthetic” or “non-aesthetic”; instead he proposes to locate the aesthetic in the phenomenon of perception to bridge those categories.<sup>70</sup> Perceiving is the act of seeing something for what it is, but perception also includes other modes of apprehending that provide the context for what is seen: “[t]he act of seeing-as is here conditioned by seeing-in-relation.”<sup>71</sup> In the reflection process of making meaning, various concepts can come together in such a way as to create “a surplus of meaning.”<sup>72</sup>

The aesthetic experience is one of seeing-in-relation, but so are all other forms of perception. This, according to Burch Brown, makes aesthetic experience inseparable from other ways of thinking and experiencing, including religion.<sup>73</sup> He sees such a strong convergence of aesthetics and theology, that “each can fully understand itself only

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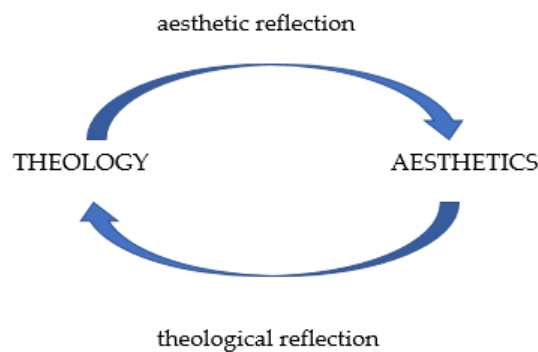
<sup>70</sup> Frank Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics: A Theological Study of Making and Meaning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 32-33.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.

through the transformations wrought through contact with the other,” and therefore, including aesthetics in theology is not so much “a theological option as a theological necessity.”<sup>74</sup> Burch Brown finds that, as theology involves a large degree of reflection, this often converges with components of faith that can be considered aesthetic. A diagram would summarize that dialogue as follows:



It is specifically in reflection that the dialogic relationship of aesthetic and theology becomes transformative.

Theological discourse is grounded in symbols, and affirms faith as “inexplicable mystery.”<sup>75</sup> The gift that art brings to theology is that it makes grace visible, while exploring “fictively, metaphorically, and experientially” that which cannot be contained in formal theology.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, art adds a depth of experience that cannot be expressed in theological discourse and this provides a creative tension which promotes both theological and aesthetic wonder.<sup>77</sup> Art reveals theology’s richness. The requirement for

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 35-37.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

discovering these theological treasures is to take the time to reflect and to be open to discover new meaning.

While Burch Brown argues that reflection constitutes the bridge between theology and the arts by way of the imagination, others have brought theology and artistic expressions together by arguing that they are the *same kind of experience*. The philosopher John Dewey informs this part of the discussion, as well as Barbara Dee Bennett Baumgarten, who has applied the work of philosopher Michael Polanyi to the intersection of theology and art, and John Kupfer, who inverted Dewey's "art as experience" to argue for "experience as art."<sup>78</sup> The type of experience investigated here is an experience that allows the dynamics of knowledge to be transformative: something that was formerly not known, now—after integrating experience with it—belongs to people's inner world and consequently, their "mindbody" has access to a different way of making meaning of the world outside.<sup>79</sup>

For Dewey, the aesthetic experience becomes meaningful through "funding," i.e. when viewing art, all of the viewer's past experiences, knowledge and understanding of the world become a reservoir of possible connections with the artifact. A work of art opens up new possibilities for the future, while at the same time the present and/or past

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<sup>78</sup> Part of this chapter was prepared as a paper for the Practical Theology Seminar in May 2013. See John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005); Barbara Dee Bennett Baumgarten, *Virtual Art as Theology* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1994), "Artistic Expression and Contemplation: Some Reflections Based On The Epistemology Of Michael Polanyi," *Tradition & Discovery* 21, no. 2 (1994-1995): 11-15; John Kupfer, "Experience as Art," in *Art and Experience*, ed. Ananta Ch. Sukla (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

<sup>79</sup> Baumgarten, 16. She credits the term "mindbody" to William Poteat, *Virtual Art as Theology* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1994), 15.

can be seen in a new way. This process of integration requires the viewer's active involvement, facilitated by the viewer's emotion. The emotions give "qualitative unity to materials externally disparate and dissimilar. They thus provide unity in and through the very parts of an experience."<sup>80</sup> The harmonious but, at the same time, dynamic organization of an aesthetic experience necessarily comes to a point of fulfillment.<sup>81</sup> This consummation is neither open-ended, so that the viewer is left with a lack of resolution, nor complete closure, which prevents any new interpretation in the future. The aesthetic experience is "fulfilled" at the point where new meaning is formed that can be integrated in the viewer's life and then become a launching pad for new explorations.

Michael Polanyi developed a post-critical philosophy, primarily for the field of science, but he also addressed art.<sup>82</sup> In the book *Visual Art as Theology* (1994), Barbara Bennett Baumgarten applies Polanyi's philosophy of science and his writings on art to the field of aesthetic epistemology. Polanyi's ideas suggest that the artist is driven to create a certain form in order to "embody a reality that exists outside of ourselves."<sup>83</sup> The impulse to create relates to the human drive for discovery, the innate desire to know more about the truth, which we always only know in part.<sup>84</sup> The viewer's reality is the reservoir

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<sup>80</sup> Dewey, 44.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-58.

<sup>82</sup> Polanyi discusses epistemology and art in, for instance, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1958).

<sup>83</sup> Baumgarten, 20.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

of resources, which Baumgarten calls “the location” of a person.<sup>85</sup> For Dewey and Polanyi, this knowledge consists of all areas of being: geographical, cultural, psychological and social, historical, etc. Polanyi calls this *tacit knowledge*: the knower is often unaware of the knowledge (or the use of it) and would be unable to explain the knowing. Tacit knowledge consists of *subsidiary knowledge*, the awareness to attend to parts, which we have without being conscious of it, and *focal knowledge*, which uses the knowledge of the particulars to form the whole observation and its meaning.<sup>86</sup> For Christians, their location includes religious experiences, theological knowledge and spiritual understanding. It amounts to a fund of religious knowledge, which makes a theological reading, even of non-religious art, possible.

The artist’s and viewer’s reservoirs of resources determine which characteristics the artist and viewer attend to and how they form these into a whole observation and its meaning.<sup>87</sup> Variations in this process of integration account for the existence of different artistic styles. In painting, for example, different locations produce different depictions—even of the same object—as well as different viewings and interpretations of the selfsame artifact.<sup>88</sup> Out of this process of integrating the parts into a whole, a new kind of knowledge arises, which is no longer unattended but rather focal – although it may still be inexpressible. The newly found meaning becomes part of the lived reality, the

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<sup>85</sup> Kupfer, 59; Baumgarten, 3-6.

<sup>86</sup> Baumgarten, 8.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 12, 51-55.

location, from which people fund new discoveries.<sup>89</sup> For the whole creative process of moving from idea to fulfillment, from parts to whole, from experience to meaning—both in making and viewing—an “indwelling” is necessary, a committed attending to particulars. Furthermore, the absorption of the new meaning into our existing fund of knowledge necessitates a willingness to deal with the consequences of the new meaning.<sup>90</sup> Both Dewey and Polanyi require a personal commitment to the experience of art in order to find meaning, with the risk that this new meaning will demand changes in the viewer’s life.

An important element in aesthetic meaning-making is the role of the imagination. It is an activity, “a *way* of seeing and feeling things as they compose an integral whole.”<sup>91</sup> Imagination is also the result; “It is the large and generous blending of interests at the point where the mind comes in contact with the world. When old and familiar things are made new in experience, there is imagination.”<sup>92</sup> For Polanyi, imagination is the understanding of what happens in the integration: “Through this process [of integration] novel traditions are brought forth which require feats of the imagination to grasp.”<sup>93</sup> Imagination means being attentive and learning how to see, integrating elements to form new meaning and reflecting on that experience and meaning.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 27-35.

<sup>91</sup> Dewey, 278 (emphasis in original).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Baumgarten, 119.

Dewey and Polanyi see the aesthetic experiences as a process that leads to a deepening understanding of our world, thereby changing our view of it. This process requires attentive involvement and commitment, the active use of imagination, openness to new knowledge, and the willingness to integrate new meaning into our everyday lives as a launching pad for fresh engagement with the world.

Three aspects of the work of Burch Brown, Dewey and Polanyi emphasize the necessity of paying attention. First, Burch Brown shows the intertwining of theology and aesthetics, and the clarifying role each plays for the other. However, depth and newness of meaning from that close involvement can only arise when one takes the time to reflect. Theology can then reveal new dimensions of aesthetics and aesthetics can bring a transformative lens to theology, opening up the riches of the revelatory and prophetic power of theology.

Second, the important function fulfilled by the imagination becomes clear again. The imagination speaks to the whole person, aesthetically and theologically, and it is through the imagination that meaning is formed out of the experiences of life. The imagination operates as the integrator between a person, object or concept currently under scrutiny, and the reservoir of experiences, memories, feelings, images, values, opinions, beliefs, etc. that form human beings into who they are. It makes new connections, in an effort to place the experience at hand in the larger scheme of who one is. The more time is devoted to this process of ruminating and reflecting, the better, deeper and more abundant the networks of meaning become.

Third, Dewey and Polanyi both describe the process of meaning making as having

distinct steps or characteristics. This parsing highlights the possibility for change and transformation to happen. When the work of making meaning is given explicit attention, the ramifications of the new knowledge become explicit too, and one has the choice to integrate and engage with the new significance or not. Since art is such an intensified form of experiences, reflection on the aesthetic experience through art provides unique opportunities for transformation, although the level of engagement and commitment will vary, depending on the life situation of the reflecting persons.

### Holding in Tension

The last element of engaged aesthetics, holding matters in tension, refers to the ability to adjourn the resolution of two or more concepts, practices, or interpretations that seem to be at odds, or even antithetical. Rather than moving quickly to solve the tension, the capacity of “suspending judgment” will enable participants to engage deeper with the issue at hand: revisiting the options, attending to details to gain more information, listening to others’ reasoning, and possibly gaining new insights. The necessity and potential of sustaining irresolution for a while, is illustrated by a scholar in aesthetic education, Philip Yenawine, who works in close association with the foremost researcher of education in museum studies, Abigail Housen. As education director of the Museum of Modern Science in New York (1983-1993), Yenawine and colleagues developed Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) to help museum visitors enhance their viewing skills. Some of these skills are also important for engaged aesthetics.

Visual art is “thick” with possible interpretations and meanings.<sup>94</sup> In the “thickness” of art, feelings are imbedded along with information, “triggering a full range of responses from those who look at it thoughtfully.”<sup>95</sup> The range of possible interpretations of a work of art allows leeway; “we can find layers of meaning beneath what we think at first. Given time, we can recognize symbols and ponder metaphors.”<sup>96</sup> Visual art provides an avenue for contemplation that includes the capacity to hold two or more ideas that seem to be in tension with each other. In order to access and increase this ability in teaching with or about art, more is needed beyond exciting an interest for the art work in the viewers; one must elicit an active viewing that constitutes *engagement* with the artwork. Such an activity is provided by the Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), where finding meaning in art is presented as a form of problem solving, i.e. combining available information with unknown or puzzling components.<sup>97</sup> The process, guided by questions from the facilitator, follows a strategy of discovery:

Look carefully.  
Talk about what you observe.  
Back up your ideas with evidence.

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<sup>94</sup> The anthropologist Clifford Geertz borrowed the notion of “thick description” from the philosopher Gilbert Ryle. See Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 6-7. Geertz used the term to describe the work of ethnography, namely to “construct a reading of . . . a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which [the ethnographer] must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render” (10). Constructing meaning in visual art concerns a similar wealth of ideas, interwoven with one another, and often expressed in ways that are unfamiliar, unorthodox and not easily grasped. In that sense I use the term “thick” in relation to visual art.

<sup>95</sup> Philip Yenawine, *Visual Thinking Strategies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2013), 9.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Listen to and consider the view of others.  
 Discuss and hold as possible a variety of interpretations.<sup>98</sup>

In the VTS discovery, the facilitator follows a script of specific questions and responses to encourage viewers to connect at a deep level to the art, informed by one's own and others' perceptions and ideas, beyond the first unreflective response.

For this dissertation, I am especially interested in the element of "holding as possible a variety of interpretations" as a transformative practice. Through a longitudinal study, Housen has shown that VTS significantly increases children's ability to think critically, i.e. to support their observations with evidence and to provide speculative answers to the question, "What is going on?"<sup>99</sup> Thinking critically hinges on the ability to hold several ideas as equally possible. It is a necessary component of reflecting and of the plausibility of change. Holding several ideas as possible at the same time points to mystery, to not knowing all the answers. Yenawine argues that "it is the kind of thinking that allows us to deal comfortably with subjects and situations that are not simple or easy to put into cubbyholes—like most of science, much of medicine, and many issues in society. To be able to tackle problems in these arenas, we have to be able to look at them from many sides and consider multiple solutions."<sup>100</sup>

It is also the kind of thinking that allows Christians to grow spiritually, when previously held ideas or beliefs are deepened, challenged, or changed. Moreover, in an

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>99</sup> See Abigail C. Housen, "Aesthetic Thought, Critical Thinking and Transfer," *Arts Learning Journal* 18 (2002): 119-20.

<sup>100</sup> Yenawine, 94.

increasingly polarized society, the ability to hold several ideas in tension—without having to be “right” or to have all the answers—may be an important element of loving one’s neighbor as oneself.

Yenawine’s Visual Thinking Strategies contribute in two ways to engaged aesthetics. The first insight is that the VTS facilitating scripts show *how* the thickness of visual art provides many ways to engage and connect, according to one’s own fund of meaning and experiences. The questions and paraphrases facilitate an abundance of ways to engage art, with every connection equally valuable and true. This makes visual art a superb environment to probe, try out, and improve the practice of holding various viewpoints or narratives in tension. The playfulness of discovering new sights and meanings in a painting, within a community of viewers, could possibly excite a similar delight and acceptance of differing ways of seeing and signifying in other contexts, such as a civic community or a community of believers.

Secondly, the research on which this teaching technique is based, shows the effectiveness of purposeful and communal reflection, creating the capacity to “see” more and withhold judgment for a while. More importantly, this capacity can be strengthened to function not only in reflection on art, but in reflection in general. The fact that this capacity can be nurtured fairly easily in art education, does not mean that holding ideas in tension is easy. The human tendency is to resolve tension; think, for instance, of story arcs in films, resolution in the last bars of music, stretching muscles after flexing them. However, that space of suspended judgment is indispensable for transformation. It is the holding that gives rise to new meaning. Moreover, the realization that more than one

view is possible becomes, itself, a fertile and paradigm-shifting insight.

### **Wesley and Engaged Aesthetics**

Obviously, Wesley's writings and work in the eighteenth century do not reflect twentieth-century insights into the rich and dynamic relationship between theology and aesthetics. Wesley did not reflect theologically—in a sustained or structured way—on the art he encountered. Neither did he employ educational strategies that included art. However, it is possible to distill the core principles of the five aesthetic movements and recognize these as underlying structures in Wesley's practical theology.

### Wesley and Embodiment

Embodiment in theology means that the body is purposefully and consciously involved in formative practices. This is what makes worship holistic, i.e. loving God with one's whole heart, body, mind, and soul (Mark 12-30). It also implies that whatever Christians do in and through their bodies has theological consequences. Finally, the participation of the body in worship and spiritual growth shows how important the affections—experiences in and through the body—are in personal and communal faith.

In the previous chapter, we have seen Wesley's involvement in works of mercy, such as almsgiving and visiting the sick and the poor. These vehicles of God's grace were *enacted bodily* by Wesley himself and by the Methodists. Wesley considered the Christian faith to encompass the whole person. Furthermore, he accorded an important role to the "affections"—emotions, inclinations and the will—in the process of

sanctification as believers grow in grace.<sup>101</sup> While it sometimes looks as if Wesley preferred or emphasized the spiritual realm, the physical world was impossible for him to separate from the spiritual. God created both and provided healing and restoration for both. That the two realms affected one another, was the concern of every Christian. Moreover, every follower of Christ was called to serve others, as much as possible, regarding their physical as well as spiritual needs.

For Wesley, living as a Christian involved all aspects of human existence, including the body. An example of how Wesley saw the importance of embodied ministry is found in his sermon “On Visiting the Sick:”

One great reason why the rich, in general, have so little sympathy for the poor, is, because they so seldom visit them. Hence it is, that, according to the common observation, one part of the world does not know what the other suffers. Many of them do not know, because they do not care to know: they keep out of the way of knowing it; and then plead their voluntary ignorances an excuse for their hardness of heart. ‘Indeed, Sir,’ said a person of large substance, ‘I am a very compassionate man. But, to tell you the truth, I do not know anybody in the world that is in want.’ How did this come to pass? Why, he took good care to keep out of their way; and if he fell upon any of them unawares ‘he passed over on the other side.’<sup>102</sup>

Wesley countered this observation with the example of Parisian women of high society, who “not only take care to relieve [sick people’s] wants, (if they need anything more than is provided for them,) but attend on their sickbeds, dress their sores, and perform the meanest offices for them. Here is a pattern for the English, poor or rich, mean or

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<sup>101</sup> See Gregory S. Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections: His Views on Experience and Emotion and Their Role in the Christian Life and Theology* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1989).

<sup>102</sup> Wesley, sermon 98, “On Visiting the Sick,” §1.3, in *Works*, 3:389. See also Manfred Marquandt, “The Altered Attitude toward the Poor,” in *John Wesley’s Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles*, reprint (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 30-32.

honorable!”<sup>103</sup> Ministry does not get more embodied than when cleaning up sick persons, taking care of their wounds, and providing for their physical comfort.

Wesley described the different dimensions of the Christian life as concentric circles in his sermon, “On Zeal.” The love of God and neighbor is at the center; around that are the holy tempers. Then follows the circle of works of mercy, “whether to the souls or bodies of others. By these we exercise all holy tempers.”<sup>104</sup> Next are the works of piety: hearing and reading Scripture, prayer, receiving communion, fasting and abstinence. The last circle is the place where all the other dimensions are practiced and encouraged, and where the believers are united: the church. The embodied aspect of Christian life may be most explicit in the works of mercy, but for Wesley embodiment pervades all aspects of the Christian life. Whether it is loving, cultivating holy attitudes and feelings, serving, attending to our spiritual life, or living out the faith in a community of brothers and sisters, the body is involved and an important component of living and expressing the holy life.

As an aesthetic category, embodiment speaks to the physicality of the Christian’s faith and ministry, but also to the possibility of encountering God through the materiality of the world around us, for instance in the celebration of the Eucharist, which retells the Incarnation through physical components. Wesley did not separate the physicality of life and the materiality of creation from the working of God’s Spirit in life and creation. By extension, we can engage with artistic matter and expressions that are infused with

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<sup>103</sup> Wesley, “On Visiting the Sick,” §I.4, 3:388.

<sup>104</sup> Wesley, sermon 92, “On Zeal,” §II.5, 3:313 (emphasis in original).

possible meanings, as opportunity to “seeing” and “hearing” God address us in fresh way.

### Wesley and Form-giving

The life consecrated to God has a particular shape: it looks like Christ. Christ-likeness is first of all the work of God in the believer, but it also requires the active response of the believer, as an individual and in community, to inhabit practices that make God’s love visible to others. Wesley gave form to his faith in multiple ways, for instance through his writing, through preaching and teaching, through his ministries on behalf of the poor and the sick, and through organizing his people into societies, classes, and bands. How Wesley shaped Methodism through the formation of societies, classes and band, has been treated frequently in other works.<sup>105</sup> In this section, I will focus on one of his other activities, namely publishing.

Wesley was well aware that his time was limited; the activities in which he chose to engage were of great value to him.<sup>106</sup> At a young age, already, he had decided to leave

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<sup>105</sup> E.g. D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Wilmore, KY: Rafiki Books, 1997); Sondra Higgins Matthaei, *Making Disciples: Faith Formation in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abington Press, 2000); Sondra Higgins Matthaei, *Formation in Faith: The Congregational Ministry of Making Disciples* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008); Matthew A. Mobley, “Common Bond: The Small Groups of Methodism” (PhD diss., Duke Divinity School, 2016); Louis McKendra Strickler, “From Class Meetings to Cell Groups: The Strength of Early Methodism for the Twenty-first Century Church” (DMin thesis, Asbury Theological Seminary, 1997); Dong-Chan Park, “A Study of the Uniqueness of John Wesley’s Class Meeting and its Application to the Korean Church” (DMin thesis, Wesley Theological Seminary, 1999); Kevin M. Watson, *The Class Meeting: Reclaiming a Forgotten (and Essential) Small Group Experience* (Wilmore, KY: Seedbed Publishing, 2014); Kevin M. Watson and Scott T. Kisker, *The Band Meeting: Rediscovering Relational Discipleship in Transformational Community* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2017).

<sup>106</sup> Wesley said, “Though I am always in haste, I am never in a hurry; because I never undertake any more work than I can go through with perfect calmness of spirit.” Wesley, Letter to “a member of the society” (December 10, 1777), *Letters*, in *Works* (Jackson), 12:304. Samuel Johnson’s opinion of Wesley was that his “conversation is good, but he is never at leisure. He is always obliged to go at a certain hour. This is very disagreeable to a man who loves to fold his legs and have out his talk, as I do.” James Boswell,

his leisurely pursuits behind and set his heart on holiness.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, he made a resolution on 19 July 1733 to encourage others toward holiness of heart and life, by speaking and by writing—composing, abridging, and translating.<sup>108</sup> In addition to his many other tasks, Wesley chose writing and editing as a way to give form to his faith and to his calling as a minister of the Gospel.<sup>109</sup> He published more than 400 works during his lifetime, from the fifty-volume *A Christian Library* to religious posters for evangelism, and many forms of publication in between.<sup>110</sup> Baker estimates that Wesley produced about two thousand editions of his publications, amounting to one and a half to two billion individual copies.<sup>111</sup>

Wesley's particular impetus for publishing may be seen as a spiritual act, "This dissemination [of scientific knowledge, such as *Primitive Physick*] constituted a form of

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*The Life of Samuel Johnson: March 19-1776-Dec. 13, 1784*, vol. 2, ed. Roger Ingpen (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1907), 752.

<sup>107</sup> Wesley, Letter to Samuel Wesley (May 22, 1727?), *Letters I (1921-1739)*, in *Works*, 25:223.

<sup>108</sup> Wesley *Journal* entry of July 19, 1733, quoted in Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (London: Epworth Press, 1970), 36. Baker mentions that Wesley had a "wholehearted dedication to [this] divine task." Frank Baker, "Publishing to the Glory of God: John Wesley as seen in his Writings," *Historical Bulletin of the World Methodist Historical Society* 11, no. 1 (1982): 2.

<sup>109</sup> For a list of works published by John and Charles Wesley, see Frank Baker, *A Union Catalogue of the Publications of Charles and John Wesley*, rev. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stone Mountain, GA: G. Zimmermann, 1991).

<sup>110</sup> Baker, "Publishing to the Glory of God," 2; for evidence of the religious posters, see Frank Baker, "John Wesley: London Publisher, 1733-1791" (annual lecture no. 3, The Friends of Wesley's Chapel, London, May 24, 1984), 6. Baker traces where and how Wesley did much of his writing in the paper "John Wesley at Leisure," *Canadian Methodist Historical Society Papers*, 1989, ed. Neil Semple (Toronto: CMHS Conference, 1990), 23-35. An early biography states that Wesley "reduced many folios and quartos to a pocket volume; . . . he abridged some of those volumes on horseback, and others in Inns, or houses, where he staid [sic] but a few days or hours . . ." See Thomas Coke and Henry Moore, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: G. Paramore, 1792), 481.

<sup>111</sup> Baker, "Publishing to the Glory of God," 2.

faith, which was closely allied to the principle of ‘plain’ language. Wesley’s plain prose-style ... contained its own theological imperative.”<sup>112</sup> He wanted “plain truth for plain people” while he stayed away from “all nice and philosophical speculation, from all perplexed and intricate reasonings and, as far as possible, from even the show of learning.”<sup>113</sup> To encourage regular reading, Wesley edited carefully selected texts for “truth, usefulness, clarity, and brevity; he always has in mind the needs of the reader.”<sup>114</sup> Wesley’s purpose for most of his writing and publishing was to connect practical piety and true knowledge in a manner that made the material accessible to all people—“bridging the gap between town and gown”<sup>115</sup>—in order to edify the people under his care in their striving toward Christian perfection and wholeness.<sup>116</sup> This was true for most of Wesley’s publications, whether they were for general knowledge, medical aid, or for spiritual growth.<sup>117</sup> Baker concludes that Wesley was “indirectly both preacher and pastor in all his publications.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> See Deborah Madden, “The Limitation of Human Knowledge: Faith and the Empirical Method in John Wesley’s Medical Holism,” *History of European Ideas* 32 (2006): 163.

<sup>113</sup> Wesley, “The Preface,” §3.1, *Sermons I*, in *Works*, 1:104.

<sup>114</sup> Isabel Rivers, “Dissenting and Methodist Books of Practical Divinity,” in *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Isabel Rivers (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), 153.

<sup>115</sup> Baker, “Publishing to the Glory of God,” 4.

<sup>116</sup> Madden, “The Limitation of Human Knowledge,” 171. Some of Wesley’s writings were polemic or apologetic in nature.

<sup>117</sup> Wesley’s pattern for his publishing activities was the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, whose aim it was to further the education of clergy, to teach the children of the poor to read and write, and to provide Bibles and devotional literature to the poor, prisoners and others in need. See Isabel Rivers, “John Wesley as Editor and Publisher,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 148.

<sup>118</sup> Baker, “Publishing to the Glory of God,” 3.

Wesley published most of his material in the duodecimo format, which was easy to carry around.<sup>119</sup> He himself read anywhere he could; by publishing small format books, he encouraged reading alongside other activities.<sup>120</sup> He made affordable reading material available for purchase through the Methodist chapels and meeting rooms; books were also sold by Methodist tradespeople and by the itinerant preachers.<sup>121</sup> In his own words, “Two and forty years ago, having a desire to furnish poor people with cheaper, shorter and plainer books than any I had seen, I wrote many small tracts, generally a penny apiece; and afterwards several larger.”<sup>122</sup>

Wesley made available what he considered the best spiritual literature because he believed in the power of the written word. His preachers were to read seven hours a day, and only those books that were recommended by Wesley in the *Minutes*.<sup>123</sup> Reading, in order to be beneficial, needed to be done at a set time every day, with the intent of spiritual instruction, attentively, and in the correct temperament, because “that reading is useless which only enlightens the understanding, without warming the affections.”<sup>124</sup> The

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<sup>119</sup> Rivers, “John Wesley as Editor and Publisher,” 154. Also, Baker, “John Wesley: London Publisher,” 7. The duodecimo format was obtained by folding a sheet of printing paper into twelve leaves, equaling twenty-four pages. The booklet would be about 7.5 by 4.5 inches.

<sup>120</sup> Rivers, “Dissenting and Methodist,” 153.

<sup>121</sup> Rivers, “John Wesley as Editor and Publisher,” 157. Also, Baker, “John Wesley: London Publisher,” 8.

<sup>122</sup> Wesley, sermon 87, “The Danger of Riches,” §II:7, in *Works*, 3:238. Baker comments, “Wesley was clearly thinking back, not to his first publications, beginning in 1733, but to 1738, and had in mind especially *Salvation by Faith and the Doctrine of Salvation, Faith and Good Works*, extracted from the Homilies.” See Baker, “John Wesley: London Publisher,” 13.

<sup>123</sup> Rivers, “John Wesley as Editor and Publisher,” 151

<sup>124</sup> This is Wesley’s 1735 translation of the “Advice to the Readers” in the 1682 Cologne edition of Thomas à Kempis’ *Imitatio Christi*. See Rivers, “John Wesley as Editor and Publisher,” 149.

preachers were not only to read in private, but also to read and explain Wesley's materials to the members of their Societies. The lay people, in turn, were to read additional materials at home.<sup>125</sup> Wesley expected the habit of reading of his preachers and lay people: "It cannot be that the people should grow in grace unless they give themselves to reading. A reading people will always be a knowing people."<sup>126</sup> This knowledge was not to be only an intellectual knowing, but rather "that inward, practical, experimental, feeling knowledge ...."<sup>127</sup> Reading was, after all, not to be done for its own sake; Wesley chose books with the aim of "a methodical, disciplined transformation in the reader's life."<sup>128</sup>

By way of extensive writing, abridging, printing, and distributing, Wesley gave shape to his conviction that the Methodists not only needed to hear and respond to the invitation to justification, but they also needed to be formed in their habits and thinking towards sanctification. He greatly multiplied his influence by publishing carefully chosen material. Wesley dedicated considerable amounts of time, money and organized manpower to the publishing venture in order to give shape to holiness of heart and life in his followers.

Wesley was deliberate about the formation of his followers—spiritually,

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<sup>125</sup> Rivers, "Dissenting and Methodist Books," 153.

<sup>126</sup> Wesley, Letter to George Holder (8 November 1790), *Letters* (Telford), 8:247.

<sup>127</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *The Christian's Pattern* (Wesley's octavo ed., 1735), xxiv-xxv, quoted in Rivers, "Dissenting and Methodist Books," 154.

<sup>128</sup> Rivers, "Dissenting and Methodist Books," 153.

physically, and culturally; individually and in the church—through his publications. It is an embodied, lived-out example of von Balthasar’s injunction about the Christian life: “Considered in all its dimensions, what could be more holistic, indissoluble, and at the same time more clearly contoured than this form of being a Christian?”<sup>129</sup> Similar to the practices involved in publishing—writing, editing, compiling, abridging, and the decisions of layout and production—producing art works and re-creating them in art viewing are activities can give particular shape to one’s spiritual life. The craft of art-making and art viewing requires skills and talent, just like good publishing. It is possible, though, to guide the process of engaging with art in such a way that the attention paid to art’s forms reveals something significant about the form of the viewers’ Christian living. These insights can trans-form people’s individual and communal spiritual lives.

### Wesley and Foregrounding

In order to live out God’s love through embodied practices, the form of one’s faith needs to include the loving of one’s “neighbors,” especially those who are disenfranchised from one’s social environment. This requires an attitude of being willing to see, hear, rub elbows with, and, if need be, physically care for those who are excluded. Noticing another person’s plight, and responding to it, becomes an act of worship, in imitation of God’s acts of lifting up the lowly. As Wesley engaged with people of all walks of life, he noticed their circumstances, and their difficulties. Although he did not often engage social reform at the political level, he was active in rallying resources for

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<sup>129</sup> Von Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 27.

the people in the margins: the (working) poor, widows and orphans, prisoners, and slaves.<sup>130</sup> Through preaching, writing, begging, and organized relief, Wesley sought to bring attention to the deplorable situations of his fellow human beings. Based on I John 4:19-21, he considered that the Christian is to love the person in need as one “who is daily *presented to his sense*, to raise his esteem, and move his kindness or compassion towards [the brother].”<sup>131</sup>

I will give two vignettes as examples of Wesley’s foregrounding: the micro-financing he instituted for the working poor, and the place of women in the Methodist organization. These will serve to argue that Wesley was moved to love and action for those fellow human beings who were often in the background.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Wesley truly loved the disenfranchised and identified with them, as one equally dependent on God’s grace and provision.<sup>132</sup>

Whereas many of the more affluent people considered the poor to be in their position because they were lazy, Wesley called this a “wickedly, devilishly false” assertion.<sup>133</sup> He

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<sup>130</sup> Occasionally Wesley wrote a tract or a letter that appealed to reform at a wider scale, such as “Thoughts on the Scarcity of Provisions” (1773) and “Thoughts upon Slavery” (1778). For more, see Graham Maddox, ed., *John Wesley’s Political Writings* (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 1998).

<sup>131</sup> Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, 4<sup>th</sup> Am. ed. (New York: Abraham Paul, 1818), 665 (emphasis added).

<sup>132</sup> E.g. Wesley, sermon 89, “The More Excellent Way,” §VI.4, in *Works*, 3:275. See also Rogal, *The Finances*, 44.

<sup>133</sup> Wesley, 9-10 February, 1753, *Journal and Diaries III (1743-1754)*, in *Works*, 20:445. Wesley sometimes referred to the poor as “the vulgar herd,” or “the great vulgar,” such as in “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse XI,” §I.6, in *Works*, 1:667; “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” §3, 3:200; “On Riches,” §II.1, 3:523; “On a Single Eye,” §II.5, in *Works*, 4:125; and Outler’s comments in 1:667n20. In all four cases, the “vulgar” poor are put in juxtaposition to men of means and learning. According to *English Synonyms Explained* vulgar stood in opposite to “polite and cultured,” rather than the contemporary connotation of tawdry or morally unregenerate. George Crabb, *English Synonyms Explained* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1902), 165.

visited the poor in “their cells underground, others in their garrets, half-starved both with cold and hunger, added to weakness and pain. But I found not one of them unemployed, who was able to crawl about the room.”<sup>134</sup> Wesley knew the industry of the working poor from close association. In July of 1746, he “observed among many a distress of another kind. [The people] frequently wanted, perhaps in order to carry on their business, a present supply of money.”<sup>135</sup> Those who had no friends or family with extra money, and who objected to lending from a pawnbroker, had no options. Wesley decided to find a remedy. He went begging for a few days among the rich people all over London and ended up with £ 50. He then put two stewards in charge of this money as a lending stock, or “poor man’s bank.”<sup>136</sup> Every Tuesday morning people could apply for a small loan of up to twenty shillings (£ 1), to be repaid in three months by weekly instalments.<sup>137</sup> Within the next year more than 250 tradespeople were helped to establish or resume their businesses.<sup>138</sup> Wesley continued to raise money for this ministry; in 1767, the capital amount had increased to £ 120, and in 1772 the maximum lending sum was £ 5.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> John Telford, *Wesley Anecdotes* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1885), 139-40.

<sup>135</sup> Wesley, *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, §XV.1, in *Works* (Jackson), 8:267.

<sup>136</sup> The term “poor man’s bank” is used in, for instance, John Fletcher Hurst, *John Wesley the Methodist: A Plain Account of his Life and Work* (London: Eaton and Mains, 1903), 253.

<sup>137</sup> Twenty shillings would have been a little more than one month’s worth of rent. For the cost of living in eighteenth century England, see “Currency, Coinage, and the Cost of Living,” *Old Baily Online*, accessed December 11, 2017, <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/static/Coinage.jsp>. The lending stock details can be found in Wesley, *A Plain Account of the People called Methodists*, §XV.1, in *Works* (Jackson), 8:267.

<sup>138</sup> Wesley, *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, §XV.2, 8:267.

<sup>139</sup> See Richard Green “The Foundery Lending Stock,” *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 3 (1902): 198n2.

In a different way, Wesley foregrounded women in his organization by allowing and enabling them to fulfill leadership roles. This is exemplified in the life of Sarah Crosby, who felt compelled to share her experience of justification to a crowd of 200 people: “I ... told them part of what the Lord had done for myself, persuading them to flee from all sin.”<sup>140</sup> Afraid that she might have crossed a line, she wrote Wesley for advice. He replied as follows,

... Hitherto, I think you have not gone too far. You could not well do less. I apprehend all you can do more is, when you meet again, to tell them simply, ‘You lay me under a great difficulty. The Methodists do not allow of women preachers; neither do I take upon me any such character. But I will just nakedly tell you what is in my heart.’ ... I do not see that you have broken any law. Go on calmly and steadily. If you have time, you may read to them the *Notes* on any chapter before you speak a few words, or one of the most awakening sermons, as other women have done long ago.<sup>141</sup>

This was the beginning of Wesley’s acceptance of women preachers, although he did not call them “preachers” until much later. In a letter of 1769, he advised Mrs. Crosby to call her gathering a “prayer meeting”; in 1771 she may make “short observations,” until in 1777, Wesley commented on the injunction against women speaking in church from I Cor. 13, that “[Methodists] allow the rule [that women should not preach]; only we believe it admits of some exception.”<sup>142</sup> By the end of that year, Sarah Crosby had held

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<sup>140</sup> Frank Baker, “John Wesley and Sarah Crosby,” *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 27 (1949-1950): 78.

<sup>141</sup> Quoted in Baker, “John Wesley and Sarah Crosby,” 79.

<sup>142</sup> Wesley wrote this to distinguish the Methodists from the Quakers, who recognized the right of women to speak under “immediate inspiration,” indicating a more occasional call to preach, the “Quaker” call. Wesley viewed the call to preach as a long-term calling. In 1803 the Wesleyan Conference passed a resolution that “in general” women should not preach; an exception was made if a woman had an “extraordinary call;” then she could preach to “her own sex.” This last stipulation was only removed in 1972. See E. Dorothy Graham, “Chosen by God: The Female Travelling Preachers,” *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 49 (October 1993): 78.

220 public meetings, 600 private meetings and innumerable spiritual conversations.<sup>143</sup> Sarah Crosby was not alone. Methodist women were active at all levels of the Methodist work: preachers, advisors and counselors, band and class leaders—even of mixed groups, leaders in education at residential, day schools and Sunday schools, visitors of the sick, backsliders and prisoners, as well as supportive ministers’ wives, devoted lay members, and influential benefactors.<sup>144</sup> Wesley gave women opportunities to perform some roles that were usual assigned to men in the late eighteenth century.<sup>145</sup> His optimism of grace provided to women the same spiritual status as for men.<sup>146</sup>

Even if some of his convictions needed time to gather force, Wesley acted upon them. His faith took the form, among other things, of care for the sick, relief for the prisoners, alms for beggars, opportunity for women leaders, schooling for the illiterate, a financial leg-up for struggling business people, and advocacy for the slaves. It was not unusual for people to be engaged in charity, but Wesley’s acts of mercy were an embodiment of his beliefs in such a way that could see and feel the predicament of the less fortunate. Analogous to looking carefully at the background of a painting, Wesley

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<sup>143</sup> Baker, “John Wesley and Sarah Crosby,” 79.

<sup>144</sup> See, for instance, Earl Kent Brown, *Women of Mr. Wesley’s Methodism* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983).

<sup>145</sup> Wesley’s attitude toward women was ambivalent; it was in some circumstances enlightened, and at other times it showed the reigning outlook of his time. See Diane Cunningham Leclerc, “Wesley’s Ambivalence Toward Women,” in “Original Sin and Sexual Difference: A Feminist Historical Theology of a Patristic, Wesleyan, and Holiness Doctrine” (PhD diss., Drew University, 1998), 113-30.

<sup>146</sup> Mark Maddix and Adrienne Maddix Meier, “Listening to Voice: Revisioning Feminist Pedagogy for Christian Education and Formation,” *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 11, no. 1 (Summer 2011), accessed Jan. 2, 2018, <http://didache.nazarene.org/index.php/component/content/article?itemid=55&id=45:vol-11-1>. Diane Leclerc asserts that Wesley came to see the social equality of women as part of the healing of the *imago Dei* after the fall. See Diane Leclerc, *Singleness of Heart: Gender, Sin, and Holiness in Historical Perspective* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 151.

was moved to notice the people in the background and lift them up. Learning to notice the backdrop in art works can possibly foster an attitude of looking beyond the obvious and past that which demands our instant attention. It offers Christians a way to emulate Jesus' attention to "the least of these" (Matt. 25:40).

### Wesley and Paying Attention

The ability to pay attention is evidenced by taking the time to reflect. It also shows a holistic approach of forming meaning out of the experiences of life. When attention is given to new meaning, the ramifications of the new knowledge become clear as well, and this constitutes an invitation to act upon that new insight. How is one to show evidence that someone was engaged in the practice of paying attention? As important as being attentive, reflecting and contemplating are for spiritual transformation, those activities can be quite imperceptible in the life of a man of constant activity like Wesley.<sup>147</sup> However, three characteristics may be traced in Wesley's life and work that indicate his habit of paying attention: the observations and reflections which he noted in his correspondence and journals; his power of integrating knowledge and experience; and the significance he accorded to experiences.

Wesley kept an extensive correspondence in which he shared his contemplations

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<sup>147</sup> One could also show, for instance, how Wesley contemplated on Scripture by tracing his references to the Bible in his sermons and other writings, or how he contemplated on his general reading by tracing the quotations in his work. However, I have chosen to remark on the level of reflection evidenced in his correspondence and in the process of publishing his *Journals*.

and advice on many topics.<sup>148</sup> Ted Campbell avers that, “the careful examination of one’s own experience was a critical component of the Christian life as Wesley taught it,” and in the private letters, spiritual subjects “are laced with indications of Wesley’s innermost thoughts and affections.”<sup>149</sup> Even with the increase of duties and responsibilities, Wesley continued to write letters throughout his life.<sup>150</sup> Interestingly, the letters to women “display an intensity of attention plainly lacking in his more administrative correspondence with his male preachers.”<sup>151</sup> Wesley served as spiritual director to many of his correspondents, but he also paid meticulous attention to the physical circumstances of his correspondents’ lives.<sup>152</sup>

Another form of deliberative reflection occurred in Wesley’s *Journals*. These publications were not straightforward autobiographical records. Rather, the journals were judiciously chosen extracts from the diaries Wesley kept. In 1740, he wrote: “It was in pursuance of an advice given by Bishop Taylor, in his ‘Rules for Holy Living and Dying,’ that, about fifteen years ago, I began to take a more exact account than I had done before, of the manner wherein I spent my time writing down how I had employed

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<sup>148</sup> It is estimated that he wrote almost 18,000 letters, of which about twenty percent has been preserved. Ted A. Campbell, “John Wesley as Diarist and Correspondent,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 130.

<sup>149</sup> Campbell, “John Wesley as Diarist,” 129, 133.

<sup>150</sup> More letters have been preserved as the decades of Wesley’s life progress. For a breakdown of numbers and possible reasons for the increase, see Frank Baker, “Introduction,” *Letters I (1721-1739)*, in *Works*, 25:1-140.

<sup>151</sup> Leclerc, “Original Sin and Sexual Difference,” 101.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-110, with particular emphasis on Wesley’s correspondence with women.

every hour.”<sup>153</sup> Wesley engaged in this kind of diary writing from 1725 until six days before his death in 1791.<sup>154</sup> Periodically, he transcribed the terse recordings of the diaries into various spiritual writings; some journals were meant for family and friends, some for the societies, and some forms were written for publication.<sup>155</sup> Nehemiah Curnock surmises that “he thus wrote and rewrote for the clearing of his own mind, that he might see his life in black and white, and so be in a position to judge accurately as to his own motives, attainments, doings, failures.”<sup>156</sup> In Wesley’s published *Journals*, we have, therefore, descriptions of people, events and encounters, as well as thoughts and opinions, all carefully selected from what he considered important enough to record in his diaries with “here and there such little reflections as occurred to my mind.”<sup>157</sup> The *Journals* not only provide a version of events and encounters based on Wesley’s discriminating reflections, but he also added deliberations on the significance of these occurrences.

Through the exercise of transcribing his diaries into a public record, Wesley contemplated the information for their value and impact as published *Journal*. This is especially evidenced by the time he took between the period covered by the diary and the

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<sup>153</sup> Wesley, “Preface,” *Journals and Diaries I (1735-1738)*, §1, in *Works*, 18:121. Baker asserts that Wesley started his diary writing on April 25, 1725, after reading Taylor’s *Holy Living*. However, Curnock argues that Wesley started noting his readings, timetables, resolutions, list of students, etc. in 1721 but *began to take a more exact account* in 1725 after reading Taylor. Frank Baker, “The Birth of John Wesley’s Journal,” *Methodist History* 1 (1970): 24; Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. 1, ed. Nehemiah Curnock (London: Epworth Press, 1938), 42-44; hereafter cited as *Journal* (Curnock).

<sup>154</sup> See the last entry in Wesley’s Diary on Wednesday February 23, 1791, in *Journal* (Curnock), vol.8, 128.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 36.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> Wesley, “Preface,” *Journals I*, §1, in *Works*, 18:121.

publication of the *Journal*—at least two years, sometimes as long as six years—; this gave Wesley the opportunity to have a better perspective on events, and to edit the *Journals* with hindsight.<sup>158</sup> A second reason to consider the *Journals* as evidence of Wesley’s thoughtful reflection, is that Wesley first published a *Journal* as a defense against inappropriate behavior towards Sophia Hopkey.<sup>159</sup> Over the years, Wesley continued to defend his beliefs, his practices, his character and his reputation, as well as Methodism, by carefully selecting and editing parts of his diaries before making them public, as a lawyer might do in defending a client.<sup>160</sup>

Another way to show how Wesley paid attention is to focus on Wesley’s consideration of his own and others’ experiences. Wesley put a premium on experience and that meant that he paid careful attention to it, whether it was in the spiritual realm, including even some of the mystics,<sup>161</sup> in the physical sphere,<sup>162</sup> or in the area of

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<sup>158</sup> Only the second and the last volume were published within two years of the last diary date. Baker, “The Birth of John Wesley’s *Journal*,” 25-26, 31. See also Reginald Ward, “Introduction,” *Journals I*, in *Works*, 18:82-83.

<sup>159</sup> On 14 March 1739, Captain Robert Williams, a Bristol merchant who was in Georgia at the time Wesley was there, accused Wesley—among other things—of seducing Mrs. Sophia Hopkey. Wesley felt compelled to act. To set the record straight, he decided to publish a summary of the facts out of his diaries “in obedience to that command of God, ‘Let not the good which is in you be evil spoken of.’” Wesley, “Preface,” §2, *Journals I*, 18:122.

<sup>160</sup> See Vicki Tolar Burton, *Spiritual Literacy in John Wesley’s Methodism: Reading, Writing, and Speaking to Believe* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 78, 80-81, 89. Also Ward, “Introduction,” 18:37-38.

<sup>161</sup> See John E. Griswold, “Mystics and the Authority of Experience in John Wesley’s Theology” (ThD diss., Boston University School of Theology, 1999), especially 81, 83.

<sup>162</sup> E.g. “[God] gave thee, together with thy other senses, those grand avenues of knowledge, sight and hearing: Were these employed to those excellent purposes for which they were bestowed upon thee? In bringing thee in more and more instruction in righteousness and true holiness?” Wesley, sermon 51, “The Good Steward,” §III.4, in *Works*, 2:294.

scientific knowledge, such as his medical practice.<sup>163</sup> In his pastoral role, Wesley often drew from his personal experience.<sup>164</sup> The evidence of experience could even cause Wesley to change theological positions. An example is found in his conversation with Peter Böhler: “I was forced to retreat to my last hold, ‘that experience would never agree with the literal interpretation of those scriptures. Nor could I therefore allow it to be true till I found some living witnesses of it.’ [Böhler] replied, he could show men such at any time.”<sup>165</sup> Böhler did as he said, and this prepared the way for Wesley’s own experience of justification by faith. A second instance can be found in the section “Two Works of Grace” in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, where Wesley inserts a footnote seven times, qualifying his earlier statements with experiences from people’s lives.<sup>166</sup>

Experience as source of knowledge for Wesley is most often recognized as spiritual knowledge: the “experimental” knowing that one is saved by grace through the Holy Spirit’s assurance.<sup>167</sup> As source of authority for Wesley, experience is the fourth of

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<sup>163</sup> See, for instance, Madden, “The Limitation of Human Knowledge,” 164. Here Wesley follows Dr. Sydenham, who called experience the only teacher.

<sup>164</sup> “[Wesley’s] power to help his friends in their perplexities was drawn largely from his own experience.” John Telford, “Introduction” in *The Letters of John Wesley*, ed. John Telford (London: Epworth Press, 1931), vol. 1, xxii; hereafter cited as *Letters* (Telford).

<sup>165</sup> Yoshio Noro, “Wesley’s Theological Epistemology,” *The Iliff Review* 28 (1971): 59-76.

<sup>166</sup> E.g. “They [who are sanctified wholly] have no *fear* or *doubt*, either as to their state in general, or as to a particular action. (footnote f: “Frequently this is the case, but only *for a time*.”) The ‘unction from the Holy one’ teacheth them every hour what they shall do, and what they shall speak; (footnote g: “For a time it may be so; but not always.”) nor, therefore, have they any need to *reason* concerning it. (footnote h: “Sometimes they have no need, at other times they have.”)” Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, §27, in *Works*, 13:151 (emphasis in original).

<sup>167</sup> E.g. Robert E. Cushman, *John Wesley’s Experimental Divinity: Studies in Methodist Doctrinal Standards* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989), 10.

Outler's "quadrilateral": Scripture, tradition, reason and experience. Outler takes pains to emphasize the exclusively spiritual nature—"a soteriological category"—of this authoritative experience: "a vital, inward faith that is upheld by the assurance of grace and its prospective triumphs, in this life."<sup>168</sup> Maddox considered experience to function wider, namely as a "test" to the interpretation of Scripture.<sup>169</sup> In an even broader understanding, I conclude that Wesley's epistemological use of experience is much more holistic, as he reflected on knowledge gained from all of human life, in light of his own and other people's experiences. He integrated experience into a holistic approach to knowledge, which underscores the significance he attached to experience.

Wesley provides us with an example of someone who paid attention to the experiences in his own life and in the lives of people around him. His correspondence and *Journals*, but also his other writings, show how he integrated experiential knowledge to promote holiness as wholeness of heart and life. Taking time to reflect is more and more a luxury and an unpracticed skill in today's world. Aesthetic reflection through art viewing gives participants the opportunity to practice paying attention, not just to the art work, but to the intricacies of their lives as well.

### Wesley and Holding in Tension

The capacity to hold two or more concepts or aspects of ideas in tension is fertile

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<sup>168</sup> Albert C. Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in Wesley," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 16-17.

<sup>169</sup> Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 46.

in different ways. It allows for mystery, and it can exhibit a hospitality in thinking, which makes it easier to build bridges between people. Moreover, in the space between two or more notions, new meaning may arise. Wesley's practical theology of holy love is characterized by a number of dialectical pairs. From his upbringing, he learned to balance high churchmanship and pietistic inclinations. In preparation for the priesthood in the Church of England, Wesley embraced the Anglican *via media* between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.<sup>170</sup> Not only did he inherit a tendency to operate in the midst of opposites from his family and his tradition, but also in the development of his own theological emphasis, where "conjunctive pairs" abound: "faith, works; personal devotions, sacramental practice; personal piety, social concern; justification, sanctification; evangelism, Christian nurture; Bible, tradition; revelation, reason; commitment, civility; creation, redemption; cell group, institutional church; local scene, world parish."<sup>171</sup> Sometimes Wesley walked a fine middle line between two extremes, for instance in the way his theology avoided the rationalism of the Deists and the experientialism of the mystics.<sup>172</sup> At other times the central stance between two positions indicated a harmonizing or a synthesis, such as his doctrine of entire sanctification which bridged Roman Catholic and Protestant views.<sup>173</sup> And sometimes Wesley lived within the

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<sup>170</sup> Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), iv.

<sup>171</sup> William J. Abrahams, *The Coming Great Revival: Recovering the Full Evangelical Tradition* (San Francisco: Harper & Breaux, 1984), 67.

<sup>172</sup> Mark L. Weeter, *John Wesley's views and use of Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 241-42.

<sup>173</sup> See, for instance, Collins's chart of how Wesley bridges Catholic and Protestant views of entire sanctification in Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 292.

uneasy tension of two situations that seem inconsistent, for example the fact that he stayed within the Church of England until his death, while allowing himself “in cases of necessity” to vary from the principles of the Church of England.<sup>174</sup>

Nor did Wesley juggle just two sides. From one perspective it can be said that he integrated *three* elements within his theology: the dynamic understanding from Eastern theology of how God’s will and human will interact; the Protestant emphasis on *sola fide* and *sola Scriptura*; and the importance of the affections, learned from his Moravian friends.<sup>175</sup> Another three-way correlation in Wesley is the Anglican trend of bridging science and philosophy with theology, which is amply evidenced in his scientific writings.<sup>176</sup> Furthermore, with respect to authoritative sources for of faith, Wesley held *four*: Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Even though Scripture was preeminent, he carefully incorporated the other three to avoid extremes in any direction.<sup>177</sup> All of these examples illustrate how Wesley’s theology emerged as distinctive, although in imitation of the early church, and akin to certain parts of other traditions.

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<sup>174</sup> For Wesley’s own words on the matter, see sermon 115, “Prophets and Priests [The Ministerial Office],” §16, in *Works*, 4:80.

<sup>175</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 14.

<sup>176</sup> Madden, “The Limitation of Human Knowledge,” 164. Madden states that John Wesley “bridged, rather than obliterated, differences between theology, science and medicine.” See Deborah Madden, “Medicine and Moral Reform: The Place of Practical Piety in John Wesley’s Art of Physic,” *The American Society of Church History* 73, no. 4 (December 2004): 742. Richard Riss concludes, “There was a holistic balance to [Wesley’s] theology [with natural philosophy and philosophy] which avoided many of the pitfalls of his contemporaries.” See Richard Michael Riss, “John Wesley’s Reactions to the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755” (PhD diss., Drew University, 2007), 116.

<sup>177</sup> Outler, “The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in Wesley,” 7-18. To consider experience a valid source of knowledge and authority was Wesley’s unique contribution to the Anglican trilateral of Scripture, tradition, and reason.

Besides the connected tensions in his theology, Wesley's life and work evidenced other strains, in part due to the era in which he lived. A consistent tension existed, for instance in Wesley's dealing with the rich and the poor: he focused on serving those in need, while befriending the wealthy who would contribute to his ministries.<sup>178</sup> A further example is his medical writing, in which he balanced experience and the common good, the "rational and emotional, idealist and pragmatic, scholarly and populist . . ." <sup>179</sup> In that particular field, Wesley "personifies the tensions and contradictions of that time."<sup>180</sup> Yet another area is Wesley's influence through publishing. With the enormous output of his writings and abridgments, Wesley can be considered a "cultural middleman," as he mediated between the educated upper-class and the less educated and illiterate lower-class.<sup>181</sup> Let these examples suffice to underscore how prevalent it was for Wesley to hold several concepts or sides of an issue in balance.

The tension between the contrasts mentioned so far was not necessarily a negative situation of pushing and pulling, of anxiety, or of indecision. Rather, the holding of two or more features caused Wesley's theology and ministry to be dynamic, vital and relevant

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<sup>178</sup> Kenneth Collins, "The Soteriological Orientation of John Wesley's Ministry to the Poor," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 36, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 7-36.

<sup>179</sup> Deborah Madden, "Experience and the Common Interest of Mankind: The Enlightened Empiricism of John Wesley's *Primitive Physick*," *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 26 (2003): 42; Deborah Madden, "Wesley as Advisor on Health and Healing," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 182.

<sup>180</sup> Madden, "Experience and the Common Interest of Mankind," 42.

<sup>181</sup> Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 351-52.

for how people lived out their faith.<sup>182</sup> In short, “Wesley’s significance as a theologian rests fundamentally on his ability to hold together elements in the Christian tradition that generally are pulled apart and expressed in isolation. Thus, he integrated contrasting emphases that are vital to a healthy and comprehensive vision of the Christian faith.”<sup>183</sup>

Wesley’s characteristic of holding two or more concepts, practices, or facets of an idea together in tension, provided a broadness in his thinking. On this basis he could say, “There are many doctrines of a less essential nature, with regard to which even the sincere children of God (such is the present weakness of human understanding) are and have been divided for many ages. In these we may think and let think; we may ‘agree to disagree.’”<sup>184</sup> And also, “Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart ...? If it be, give me thine hand.”<sup>185</sup>

The practice of suspending judgement for a while, and considering various points of view, is not encouraged in our quick-reacting culture. And yet, it can yield great insights. Since art viewing is a process that encourages meaning-making from one’s own fund of memories, experiences and ideas, it offers the possibility to learn how to hold various interpretations in suspension. This may then transfer to the capacity to hold tensions in life, in faith, in practices, in relationships, while being open to new and

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<sup>182</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 19, 172ff; Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 6-16; Donald A.D. Thorsen, *Calvin vs Wesley: Bringing Belief in Line with Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), xvii.

<sup>183</sup> Abrahams, *The Coming Great Revival*, 67.

<sup>184</sup> Wesley, sermon 53, “On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield,” §III.1, in *Works*, 2:341.

<sup>185</sup> Wesley, sermon 39, “Catholic Spirit,” §5, 2:82, quoting from 2 Kings 10:15.

creative insights for change.

### **Wesley's Aesthetic Practical Theology**

A close look at the intersection of what Wesley said he believed and what he did, shows features of an engaged aesthetic. Wesley did not develop his theology from an aesthetic point of view, nor did he think systematically in a theological manner about the art and beauty he encountered. Nevertheless, Wesley's practical theology can be called aesthetic because of the way in which he practiced his beliefs and how his practices expressed his theology: acknowledging the embodiment of faith, giving form to his faith through his habits, his ministries—such as writing, editing, and publishing—and his organization of the Methodists, while he was perceptive of, and responsive to, people who were marginalized in that time: women, the poor, the sick, prisoners, and slaves. Wesley's writings show that he paid attention to his own and others' experiences, incorporating that knowledge in his theology and practices. Finally, in his theology and work, Wesley consistently balanced two or more aspects or positions, which resulted in a vital faith and dynamic approach to ministry.

The engaged aesthetic nature of Wesley's practical theology invites an engaged aesthetic solution to the congruence gap in the Church of the Nazarene. A second reason to turn to aesthetic reflection is its ability to address the discrepancy in beliefs and practices because of the transformative potential in aesthetic epistemology. In the next chapter, I will examine how aesthetic meaning-making works and I will establish how aesthetic epistemology is compatible with Wesley's epistemology.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **AESTHETIC EPISTEMOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

If John Wesley's practical theology had an engaged aesthetic character, then there must be an epistemology present in Wesley's work that enables those aesthetic features. If Wesleyans want to emulate Wesley in the theological practice of Christian education, then it is fitting to investigate aesthetic epistemology to discover if the epistemology (also) fosters an engaged aesthetic characteristic in Christian education. To that end, I will explore aesthetic epistemology—the knowledge gained from aesthetic experiences, with particular attention to the arts, which are commonly associated with aesthetic experience. Art comes in many forms that provide rich encounters and religious experiences. For this dissertation, however, I focus on visual art for the sake of depth. I will examine the stages of aesthetic development and determine how these stages are helpful in discerning pedagogical goals for aesthetic Christian education. I will then briefly describe what happens in the process of perception: how the brain is involved in seeing, how meaning is formed through the visual perception system, how this relates to viewing art, and how the aesthetic knowledge gained through viewing art can nurture an engaged aesthetic. Finally, I will conclude with a short enquiry into the epistemology of Wesley himself, to establish if aesthetic epistemology has affinity with the epistemological underpinning of Wesley's espoused and operant theologies.

Engaged aesthetics, as laid out in chapter 3, is composed of three particular emphases in the intersection of theology and aesthetics—embodiment, form giving, and

foregrounding, while paying attention and holding in tension originate in general aesthetic theory and aesthetic education. These latter two actions are instrumental in bringing about the former three; paying attention and holding in tension are necessary for embodiment, form giving and foregrounding to take place. The question now arises, what is so special about an aesthetic way of paying attention and holding in tension that it can facilitate the processes of embodiment, form giving and foregrounding? At stake here is the issue of aesthetic epistemology: the activities of paying attention and holding in tension *in an aesthetic mode* enables persons to know things about themselves, other people, God, and the world around them, which brings about a possibly transformative variety of meaning-making.

The field of aesthetics is complex. It comprises the arts, but also concepts of beauty, the sublime, and appreciation of nature. Since the goal of my argument is the formulation of a pedagogical practice, I will limit my investigation of aesthetic epistemology to one of the areas that is the most practical to include in a classroom setting, visual art. I therefore focus on the aesthetic epistemology that has as its subject the knowledge involved in the viewing of visual art.<sup>1</sup>

### **Aesthetic Knowing**

The definition cited above indicates that aesthetic knowledge is about experience,

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<sup>1</sup> I focus on the aesthetic epistemology of the visual arts, and particular of paintings, prints and photographs, because they are easiest to bring into the class room as an original, or most closely reproduced as an image. However, there is evidence that many features of aesthetic epistemology cross over between the different art forms. See, for instance, Gabrielle G. Starr, *Feeling Beauty: The Neuroscience of Aesthetic Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2013), especially chapter 1, "Introduction: Aesthetics, Neuroaesthetics and the Sister Arts," 1-32.

involves reflecting and affects the emotions. It is a reflected, affective, experiential kind of knowing. This was already argued extensively by John Dewey in his 1934 book, *Art as Experience*.<sup>2</sup> He considered art to be an intensified form of the aesthetic experiences that people encounter in everyday life.<sup>3</sup> For Dewey, the aesthetic experience requires harmony.<sup>4</sup> This harmony is expressed in the relationship between the “doing and undergoing” of art, the making of art and the viewing of art.<sup>5</sup> Both sides of these dyads are related to “funding,” which means “bringing interests, attitudes, meanings and values, from previous experiences to present perception.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, when undergoing art, all of the viewer’s past experiences, knowledge and understanding of the world become a reservoir of possible connections with the artifact. Aesthetic experience is also characterized by temporal unity: a coherence of past, present and future.<sup>7</sup> Viewers bring their fund of past experiences to create meaning out of a present artifact. A work of art opens up new possibilities for the future, while at the same time the viewer sees the present and/or past world in a new way.

Another feature of the aesthetic experience is the “mutual modification of parts,”

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<sup>2</sup> For the following discussion, I have made use of John Kupfer’s excellent synopsis of Dewey’s work in “Experience as Art,” in *Art and Experience*, ed. Ananta Ch. Sukla (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 57-70.

<sup>3</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Berkley Publishing, 2005), 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that the experience itself is harmonious; rather, the features of aesthetic experience need to be in balance, although the experience itself can be jarring, disturbing, and thought provoking.

<sup>5</sup> Kupfer, “Experience as Art,” 58-59.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 59. Dewey speaks of “funded” ideas, meanings, interactions, and experiences (54, 91, 93, 102-3, 275, 284, 287, 301, 322).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

which refers to the harmony between the constitutive elements of a work of art and the overall composition.<sup>8</sup> The process of integration requires the viewer's active involvement, facilitated by the viewer's emotion. Emotion "is the moving and cementing force. It selects what is congruous and dyes what is selected with its color, thereby giving qualitative unity to materials externally disparate and dissimilar. It thus provides unity in and through the very parts of an experience."<sup>9</sup> The harmonious but, at the same time, dynamic organization of an aesthetic experience necessarily comes to a point of fulfillment.<sup>10</sup> This consummation is not open-ended, so that the viewer is left with a lack of resolution, nor does it provide complete closure, which would prevent any new interpretation in the future. The aesthetic experience is "fulfilled" at the point where new meaning is formed that can be integrated in the viewer's life, becoming a launching pad for new explorations.

Art is a particular organization of energies which has a uniqueness that draws our attention. Attention causes perception to linger; elements emerge from the background and form a "pervading qualitative unity."<sup>11</sup> That quality is elusive; whatever one specifies as *this is it*, there is always more to the artwork and its aesthetic quality,

There is no name to be given it. As it enlivens and animates, it is the spirit of the work of art. It is its reality, when we feel the work of art to be real on its own account and not as a realistic exhibition. It is the idiom in which the particular work is composed and expressed, that which stamps it with individuality. ... We are never wholly free from the sense of something that lies beyond. ... [The]

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<sup>8</sup> Kupfer, 59-60.

<sup>9</sup> Dewey, 44.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 199-200.

sense of the including whole implicit in ordinary experiences is rendered intense within the frame of a painting or poem.<sup>12</sup>

In order for something to qualify as art, it will have to have “imaginative and emotional value.”<sup>13</sup> The painting has to contain enough substance for the imagination to be engaged—ambiguity, metaphor, symbolism—while it also has an affective quality that holds the viewer’s attention, and invites the viewer to make a meaningful connection between the subject of the painting (what it is about), the medium and skill of the artist (how the subject is expressed), and the emotion expressed. “Art,” for Dewey, “is a quality of doing and of what is done.”<sup>14</sup> The “work” of art is then not so much an object, but an activity, namely the “cooperat[ing] with the product so that the outcome is an experience . . . .”<sup>15</sup>

Dewey resisted the notion that the aesthetic experience itself was knowledge. Rather, the viewing of art results in something more than knowledge, because non-rational elements are added to form an experience that is valued for being an experience.<sup>16</sup> Other writers about aesthetics, though, have identified specific knowledge involved in the viewing of an artwork. Dominic Lopes, for instance, mentions three kinds of knowing: first, “knowing about” a painting as a physical object: the painting is on canvas; it measures 10x14 inches; it is an oil painting; it is a still life painting. Second,

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 200-1.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 302. Dewey says that “knowledge is transformed. . . . Knowledge is instrumental to the enrichment of the immediate experience through the control over action that it exercises.”

“knowing through” a painting gives information about the artists and their circumstances: this painter was influenced by style X and had access to the exotic fruits and silver bowls she painted. Third, “knowing in” is the content of what the artist tells us by way of the painting: the still life invites the viewer to reflect on the brevity of life.<sup>17</sup>

Knowing about, through and in, represents three different kinds of knowledge. All three can influence the experience of the art work, but, Lopes concludes in agreement with Dewey, what makes art viewing worthwhile is not simply the painting’s cognitive value. The *experience* of seeing—with its emotional rewards—is what makes the gained knowledge valuable.<sup>18</sup> Lopes calls for the viewer to be “a fine observer.” The act of “fine seeing” requires the same kind of attention that the artist needed to apply in order to produce the art, namely a finely-tuned ability to observe the details and their relevance. Many pictures are “dense representations” in which every stroke and depiction is important. Since the artist chose all the elements of the design, each is potentially meaningful. Secondly, an “accuracy in seeing” is demanded; to notice not only the individual markings, but to see the familiar in a fresh way, and to pay attention to the sensory qualities of the experience of seeing. Thirdly, an “adaptability of seeing” is required; the viewer’s power of vision is stretched to see what the art reveals of the otherwise invisible. An example of this ability is seeing perspective, the representation of a third dimension in a two-dimensional image.

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<sup>17</sup> Dominic McIver Lopes, *Sight and Sensibility: Evaluating Pictures* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 133-34.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 148-49.

### Development in Aesthetic Knowledge

Backed by extensive research, Abigail Housen has categorized aesthetic development of art viewers and the level of sophistication viewers bring to their experiences of art.<sup>19</sup> In each stage, the viewer engages in a distinctive way, sees differently, has experiences of the art that are unique to that stage, and makes meaning out of the data in a different manner.<sup>20</sup> The five stages are the Accountive Stage (I), the Constructive Stage (II), the Classifying Stage (III), the Interpretive Stage (IV), and the Re-Creative Stage (V).<sup>21</sup>

In Stage I the viewer forms a narrative of the concrete observations, closely and emotionally connected to the viewer's own experience and knowledge. In Stage II, more detailed perceptions and knowledge construct a framework of meaning; at the same time insights develop about the intentionality of the artist. In Stages I and II, students grow to integrate their own and others' insights and form new meaning through a process of discovery.<sup>22</sup> They learn to consider other people's observations and insights, and understand that there can be more than one "right" answer. In Stage I, the viewer is

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<sup>19</sup> See Abigail Housen, "The Eye of the Beholder: Measuring Aesthetic Development" (Ed.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1983). Housen gives an overview of her research journey and findings in the article "Voices of Viewers: Iterative Research, Theory, and Practice," *Arts and Learning Research* 17, no. 1 (2000-2001): 2-12.

<sup>20</sup> Housen first described these stages in chapter V, "Stages of Aesthetic Understanding," of "The Eye of the Beholder," 140-71.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> In addition, viewers learn to back up their observations with evidence, which promotes critical thinking, a feature that makes this method interesting for K-12 educators. See Philip Yenawine, *Visual Thinking Strategies: Using Art to deepen Learning Across School Disciplines* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2013).

focused on using knowledge *in* art to construct a narrative with personal overtones, i.e. meaning is formed by combining the visual story elements and personal experience. Stage II enables the viewer to add knowledge *through* art by careful observation and deduction. The new information moves away from the viewer toward the artist, enabling different layers of interpretation.

In Stage III, the viewer becomes interested in the art historical background. This information, together with the deep observations and expanded insights, allows a multifaceted response to the art. At this point, salient *knowledge about* the painting assists the viewer in seeing the art in a new way *as art*. The sustained attention also adds *knowledge through* the painting. The new sources of information allow for a better understanding of the artist's context and possible intentions, which leads to more seeing and *knowing in* the art. With the enlarged fund of knowledge *about* and *through* the art, the potential of the imagination to combine art historical knowledge with the viewer's experiences and memories increases considerably. In addition, viewers learn to change their conclusions based on new information, to support it with evidence, and to take ownership of their opinions.

The enrichment of experience is further developed in Stage IV, when the viewer lets the meaning of the work unfold slowly as critical skills integrate with feelings and intuitions about the art's symbolism. This is, I surmise, the stage where viewers draw more extensively from their own funds of experiences, which enables a more personal connection to be formed, resulting in the development of deeper meaning. Stage IV includes more consciously the affective element as a factor in meaning-making, a process

that becomes more fluent over time. The viewer interacts spontaneously with the painting, and observations become subtler. Each new encounter offers the possibility of more discovery and more perceptions, as well as enjoyment of previous insights. What the viewer knows about and from the painting now allows the affections to emerge and color the discernments. The multiple insights from the group help the viewers to see the art work from many points of view.

In Stage V, the viewer is well-acquainted with art viewing and comes to the art work with an attitude of expectancy, openness and patience. Art is seen as having its own life. This stage characterizes the imagination's ability to integrate all elements: knowledge about, through and in the artwork, together with one's experiences, affections, memories, values and interests. With bountiful resources of memories and knowledge, the viewer reflects on the artwork imaginatively rather than analytically, including both personal and universal aspects. Interestingly, familiarity with a particular artwork does not breed boredom, but rather a fuller acquaintance, as if it is an old friend.

### Difficult Transitions

The developmental stages appeared to be mostly determined by exposure to art, time spent with each art work, and the ability to think critically.<sup>23</sup> Housen found, however, that most adults, even people who visit museums frequently, are in Stages I-II/III. She discovered that the transition into Stage III and into Stage V is less fluent than

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<sup>23</sup> See the paragraph "Factors Influencing Aesthetic Development" in Housen, "The Eye of the Beholder," 183-89.

the transitions from Stage 1 to II, or III to V.<sup>24</sup> For Stage III, analytical skills are necessary to process the observed information in an art historical, methodical framework. The critical skills require a certain intellectual development, usually not attained until the age of twenty-one.<sup>25</sup> The art historical knowledge can only be acquired over a period of time, whether through formal or informal study.

In Stage I through Stage III, the analytical skills are most important. In Stage IV, however, the viewer's feelings become more explicitly involved. Stage V poses the difficulty that the viewer needs to achieve a balance between knowledge and emotion, between critical reflection and spontaneous encounter.<sup>26</sup> Housen's research indicates that, in order to achieve that stage, a long period of exposure is required, as well as a level of maturity.<sup>27</sup> The passing of time—to study art history and to be exposed to art—explains the slowing of the transitions into Stage III and Stage V.

### Learning through Questions

In cooperation with others, Housen found that the transition from Stage I to Stage

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 184-85.

<sup>25</sup> Housen has identified two tracks for people who move from Stage II to Stage III: through a transitional Stage II/III, where the viewer develops in critical thinking and acquires art historical information roughly at the same time; or through a transitional Stage II/IV, when the viewer has the critical skills to observe and interpret some of the symbolism, but is not well-versed in the aesthetic symbols. While Stage II/IV seems to suggest that the stages are not necessarily sequential, a Stage II/IV viewer will first need to do the work of Stage III before being able to master Stage IV and more on to Stage V. See Housen, "The Eye of the Beholder," 186.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 138, 188.

<sup>27</sup> Although in her study the earliest age to reach Stage V was fifty-two, Housen emphasizes that exposure time had a greater impact on the subjects' aesthetic development than age. See Housen, "The Eye of the Beholder," 184, 186.

II can be facilitated by means of a series of carefully designed questions and supportive paraphrasing by the teacher.<sup>28</sup> Curriculum developed by Housen and Yenawine, called Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), focuses on the value of aesthetic development from Stage I into Stage II for K-12 students.<sup>29</sup> This group discovery requires only three elements: a stimulus, which is the art work; a method to keep viewers' attention focused, namely asking guiding questions; and a process that allows wondering, reflecting and meaning-making to take place in a safe environment, facilitated by the teacher who paraphrases, links, and comments encouragingly on the viewers' observations.<sup>30</sup>

Three questions are asked, based on the kind of information the students are looking for in their respective stages. The first question is, "What is going on in this picture?"<sup>31</sup> To encourage the narrative response of viewers in Stage I, the image represents identifiable people, actions, encounters, backdrops, and emotions.<sup>32</sup> However,

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<sup>28</sup> See the bibliography in Abigail Housen, "Art Viewing and Aesthetic Development: Designing for the Viewer," in *From Periphery to Center: Art Museum Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Pat Villeneuve (Alexandria, VA: National Art Education Association, 2008), 172-79, for the contributions of Karin DeSanti and Phillip Yenawine. Since the Stages III-V require personal growth as well as investment in studying art history, and in experiencing art, the art curriculum for K-12 and the docent-guided tour in museums targets only the development of Stages I-II.

<sup>29</sup> The approach of Visual Thinking Strategies is also used in museum education, where it has received some criticism. See, for instance, Rika Burnham and Elliott Kai-Kee, "Questioning the Use of Questions," in *Teaching in the Art Museum: Interpretation as Experience*, ed. Rika Burnham and Elliott Kai-Kee (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011), 94-111. I will focus on the value of VTS for classroom teaching in the context of adult Christian education.

<sup>30</sup> Housen, "Voices of Viewers," 7.

<sup>31</sup> This question elicits a more complex answer than the question "What do you see in this picture?" See Yenawine, *Visual Thinking Strategies*, 25.

<sup>32</sup> Philip Yenawine, "Jump Starting Visual Literacy: Thoughts on Image Selection," *Art Education* 56, no. 1 (January, 2003): 8.

the image also needs sufficient “paradox, ambiguity and complexity.”<sup>33</sup> After about a minute of quiet looking, viewers are invited to tell the story they see in the artwork. There is no one right answer; many responses are possible. The teacher’s affirmative paraphrasing and openness create a trusting environment where a diversity of responses is encouraged and recognized as an authentic experience. With the second question, “What more do you see?” the teacher encourages the viewers to continue looking.<sup>34</sup> In this atmosphere, viewers increase their attention and their observation capacity, while at the same time discovering what the others have observed. The group process allows the viewers to decode the symbolism of the art work as they learn from each other’s observations.

The third question, “What do you see that makes you say that?” moves the viewers into Stage II. Rather than responding on the basis of first impressions, this question invites more careful attention to the details and subtleties of the art work. In answering, the viewer may speculate on and interpret what is seen, by providing supporting evidence from the image. Other viewers may, in turn, see new things out of that response. The teacher facilitates this stage by linking observations and ideas of various viewers, which increases their skills to notice details and meaning in the art. In the process of hypothesizing, revising, and re-interpreting, viewers learn that multiple insights are possible, that aesthetic experience is open-ended, and pleasantly similar to

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<sup>33</sup> Housen, “Voices of Viewers,” 7.

<sup>34</sup> The paraphrase “What *else* do you see?” seems to indicate that the teacher is looking for something specifically in response, whereas “What *more* do you see?” leaves the response open. See Yenawine, *Visual Thinking Strategies*, 27.

solving a problem. Viewers attain a level of fine observation and aesthetic pleasure.

### **Pedagogical Goals**

The pedagogical goals of the Visual Thinking Strategies can be described as three-fold. In museum education, VTS is instrumental in developing *aesthetic pleasure* and the ability to *become a fine observer*, and in K-12 education, VTS may be used for the exclusive or additional goal of *critical thinking*. The pedagogical purpose for aesthetic development in the context of Christian education is different: aesthetic reflection in every stage is meant as a space of imaginatively connecting observations with experiences, emotions, memories, knowledge, values, attitudes, and interests in such a way that spiritual transformation is possible. For that holistic goal, the knowledge-gathering and interpretation features of *each* stage are important. In spite of the hurdles for attaining Stages III and V, it will be worth the effort to invent a curriculum to help viewers develop past Stage II. The pedagogical rewards that arise out of Housen's research are enticing and invite further reflection.

### **Art and Neuroscience**

Recent research in cognitive neuroscience has given more insight in how meaning-making takes place. Especially significant are the metaphor, and the role of empathy, imitation, and attention to the formation of understanding and meaning.

### The Importance of Metaphor

In the book *The Soul in the Brain: The Cerebral Basis of Language, Art and Belief*, Michael Trimble argues that art and religion have a similar basis in the processes of the brain. They both require a kind of suspension of the information through our senses. After all, the existence of God cannot be scientifically proven, and “faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (Hebr. 11:1). Likewise—to the brain—visual art provides the illusion of objects, people and landscapes in three dimensions where only two observable dimensions exist.<sup>35</sup> Both “represent a way of grappling with hidden connections in our lives and in our psyche.”<sup>36</sup>

More importantly for how art and religion are processed in the brain, they both use symbols and metaphors to express meaning. Metaphors offer knowledge that goes beyond the strictly logical content of straightforward language. This is done “through linguistic transformations interacting between thought and feeling.”<sup>37</sup> The emotive value contributes to the fecundity and depth of meaning, providing multiple ways to connect, and defying the human tendency to formalize, abstract or select one significance.<sup>38</sup> Metaphor allows knowledge to emerge in a way that is not possible through other kinds

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<sup>35</sup> Michael R. Trimble, *The Soul in the Brain: The Cerebral Basis of Language, Art and Belief* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2007). Trimble talks about representational art, although the human brain always looks for recognizable, known objects in abstract art. See Eric R. Kandel, *The Age of Insight: The Quest to Understand the Unconscious in Art, Mind and Brain, from Vienna 1900 to the Present* (New York: Random House, 2012), 218, 275, 338.

<sup>36</sup> Trimble, *The Soul in the Brain*, 24.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 184. Trimble uses the work of Frank Burch Brown, *Transfiguration* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

<sup>38</sup> Mark Johnson, *The Meaning in the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 274.

of speech or writing.

Mark Johnson argues that all human cognition uses metaphoric image schemas that are based in the body, even for abstract thinking.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, “the structures, processes, and qualities that make art possible and valuable are exactly the same ones that constitute all meaning, thought, and understanding. I will be emphasizing that these aspects of embodied meaning are not, for the most part, propositional, and it therefore follows that meaning cannot be primarily linguaform and propositional.”<sup>40</sup> Art derives its meaning from these embodied features and in art they come to their highest realization. Primordial, neurological structures are in place in the brain that predate language, hence the indescribable, transcendent quality that can be communicated—only—through the embodied knowledge of metaphors.

#### A Closer Look at Meaning-Making

Perception, cognition, emotions, and actions are linked physically in neurological systems through the combination of two processes: the bottom-up pathway and the top-down pathway.<sup>41</sup> In the bottom-up route, information enters through the senses, and is then sent through more than thirty areas of the brain for processing. It can follow a particular pathway that looks for “what” the information is, or the pathway that decodes

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<sup>39</sup> Johnson, “The Corporeal Roots of Symbolic Meaning,” in *The Meaning in the Body*, 135-54.

<sup>40</sup> Johnson, “Embodied Meaning, Aesthetics and Art,” in *The Meaning in the Body*, 213. See also Trimble, *The Soul in the Brain*, 186.

<sup>41</sup> Kandel, “Biology of the Beholder’s Visual Response to Art” and “Biology of the Beholder’s Emotional Response to Art,” in *The Age of Insight*, 225-438.

the “where” data. At the end, all information is integrated. Then the information is re-evaluated in a top-down manner. The brain disregards aspects that are not pertinent, searches for consistency, and boils the information down to the fundamental features of objects, people, and landscapes. Finally, the brain does the important work of comparing the composite of information—a representative image—to other images, drawn from the memory of other experiences. In fact, the brain internally re-creates a model of the external image. The internal model is perceptual, cognitive, emotionally valued, meaning-laden, and it includes a plan for (re)action.<sup>42</sup> “Making models of the world is also the core function of the perceptual, emotional, and social systems in the human brain. It is this modeling capability that makes possible both the artist’s creation of a work of art and the beholder’s re-creation of it. . . . the brain’s capability for imitation and empathy gives both artist and beholder access to the private mental world of others.”<sup>43</sup> The brain is wired to mirror what it perceives and in so doing the brain inevitably re-creates the creative work of the artist, using cognitive, emotional, and empathic information.<sup>44</sup> “The reason visual arts are so creative is because your brain won’t let you *not* create. Seeing requires developing a created sense of *what is* and *what could be*.”<sup>45</sup>

The bottom-up and top-down processes are also at work in viewing art: “Because we fully appreciate that a painting is a likeness and not a true reality, we unconsciously

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 231, 284.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 449-50.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 393.

<sup>45</sup> Eric Jensen, *Arts with the Brain in Mind* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001), 55 (emphasis in original).

make both top-down (previously learned) and intuitive (unlearned) corrections in our perception of it.”<sup>46</sup> The visual perception system needs to work harder to make sense of art than of non-art. The brain cannot as easily discard unimportant elements because it is not clear at first glance which details are not significant, in contrast to the learned evaluation of everyday life’s minutiae. Therefore, the brain needs to pay more attention. Research has revealed that attention is also the binding agent that coordinates the activities of the different parts of the brain involved in the what and the where path.

The two-dimensionality of the painting demands adjustments from the brain to experience the subject as three-dimensional. Moreover, every work of art is in some way an abstraction from reality.<sup>47</sup> These abstractions are expressed in how artists group or isolate details, in contrast, symmetry, repetition of rhythm, orderliness, balance, metaphor, in avoiding coincidence and in the solution of perceptual problems.<sup>48</sup> Every one of these categories provides information that the brain—consciously or unconsciously—processes, integrating the perceptual information with art historical and cultural knowledge. Then the top-down process begins of integrating the information with the emotive value of colors, facial expressions, movement, and the information from remembered images, experiences and emotions. Religious life provides important aspects

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<sup>46</sup> Kandel, “Biology of the Beholder’s Visual Response to Art” and “Biology of the Beholder’s Emotional Response to Art,” in *The Age of Insight*, 316.

<sup>47</sup> Hyper-realistic art and photography are the least abstracted, but they still include features that make them a representation, instead of an exact copy of the subject at hand.

<sup>48</sup> Kandel, *The Age of Insight*, 445. Kandel quotes this list from V. S. Ramachandran and W. Hirstein, “The Science of Art: A Neurological Theory of Aesthetic Experience,” *Journal of Consciousness Study* 6-7 (June 1999), 15-51.

to the top-down process: the cognitive, social, emotional, cultural, historical, and empathic significance of faith combine with past experiences and memories to form the meaning of religious experience.<sup>49</sup>

What is actually said (or written or depicted) in the metaphor is the tip of the iceberg of meaning, “and this meaning pulsates with corporeal significance.”<sup>50</sup> Although many metaphors have universal meaning, many others have specific cultural and historical significance, adding to the reservoir of possible meaning. Art uses all of these aspects of metaphor in its effort to express multiple layers of significance in the experience it depicts. And because of the shared metaphoric basis, art is preeminent as a place for religious meaning-making.

### Ambiguity and the Ineffable

Art and religion also have in common the occurrence of ambiguity. Ambiguity in Christianity is especially found in the poetic parts of the Bible and in the parables of Jesus. Ambiguity is central to the arts as well. It is “at once a device for compression of language and for exploitation of its riches,” because “in ambiguities opposites converge.”<sup>51</sup> Occurrences and concepts may be expressed in any number of metaphors,

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<sup>49</sup> See also Trimble on the work of William James; “The Variety of Religious Experience,” in *The Soul in the Brain: The Cerebral Basis of Language, Art and Belief* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2007), 13-16. “Evidence is slowly accumulating for some understanding of the cerebral associations of religious experiences: that such experiences are embodied in the brain and that the key circuits involve the temporal and parietal lobes especially of the nondominant hemisphere” (175).

<sup>50</sup> Johnson, *The Meaning in the Body*, 219.

<sup>51</sup> Trimble, *The Soul in the Brain*, 81. Trimble draws from William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Hogarth Press, 1991).

which can vary in meaning and be inconsistent with each other; this creates ambiguity.<sup>52</sup> Every metaphor provides its own logic, giving us the variety of meaning “that we need in order to understand the richness and complexity of our experience.”<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, metaphors can carry diverging and clashing emotions, which adds to their complexity.<sup>54</sup> The ambiguity embedded in art and religion brings about different responses from different people; it can elicit even different responses from the same person at different times.<sup>55</sup>

Yet another feature that art and religion share, is the quality of the *ganz andere*, the *something more* that cannot be expressed in words.<sup>56</sup> This state refers to people being moved without being able to communicate exactly how or why.<sup>57</sup> The “unsayable-ness”

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<sup>52</sup> An example of two inconsistent metaphors for the concept of time is the movement of time (“the month flew by”) and the moving observer (“we are approaching the holidays”). See Johnson, *The Meaning in the Body*, 27-31.

<sup>53</sup> Johnson, 258.

<sup>54</sup> Kandel, *The Age of Insight*, 436, 446.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

<sup>56</sup> Trimble, *The Soul in the Brain*, 18, 202. Trimble relates the ineffability of art to the fact that art, language and religion developed at the same time in the evolutionary neurobiology of the brain (200).

<sup>57</sup> People are sometimes overcome with emotion when experiencing a work of art. To an extreme degree this is considered a psychosomatic condition called the Stendhal Syndrome. See “Having an Art Attack: A Brief Look at Stendhal Syndrome,” accessed January 13, 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/in-excess/201403/having-art-attack>. But lesser experiences can still be life-changing. Think, for instance, of Paul Tillich’s encounter with the *Madonna with singing Angels* by Botticelli, and Henry Nouwen’s meeting with Rembrandt’s *Prodigal Son*. See John Dillenberger and Jane Dillenberger, eds., *Paul Tillich on Art and Architecture* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1989), 20; Henri J.M. Nouwen, “Prologue: Encounter with a Painting,” in *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*, reissue edition (New York: Image Books/Doubleday Publishing Group, 1994), 3-18. Kandel attributes the powerful emotions that art can elicit to the brain’s modulating systems. See Kandel, “How the Brain Regulates Emotion and Empathy,” in *The Age of Insight*, 422-36. Art historian James Elkins devoted a book, *Pictures and Tears* (New York: Routledge, 2004) to the phenomenon of people being extraordinarily moved by images.

that art and spirituality share is not a detriment, but rather something to cherish: “In these areas we are given the privilege of speaking languages beyond language and knowing truths beyond knowing.”<sup>58</sup> Researchers suggest, that human beings experience those kind of aesthetic or religious emotions because the pathway that deals with these emotions involves not the left hemisphere, oriented to propositional knowledge, but the right hemisphere, specialized in creative and holistically processing of complex metaphors, and able to recognize the emotional quality of images.<sup>59</sup>

### Empathy and Imitation

In addition to cognition and emotion, empathy plays an important role in the brain’s work of making meaning out of sensory information.<sup>60</sup> Empathy is the ability to infer and predict how another person would think and react in the world. Close to empathy is imitation. Researchers have found that the human brain includes mirror neurons that are capable of eliciting the same physical reaction, in the viewer’s body, as the emotion observed.<sup>61</sup> Empathy and imitation are necessary for a “theory of mind,” a feature that enables people to imagine themselves in someone else’s shoes.<sup>62</sup> Only with

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<sup>58</sup> Steven R. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human* (Grand Rapids, MI, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 2. Guthrie points to people who have suggested that all art is spiritual “because it arises from and gives voice to the deepest place in us”; he agrees that “the traits that make the work seem most ‘spiritual’ are also what make it seem most human,” (xiv, 34).

<sup>59</sup> Trimble, *The Soul in the Brain*, 83, 200-201. See also table 4.1, “The Historical Developments of Ideas about the Functioning of the Left and Right Hemispheres” (91).

<sup>60</sup> Kandel, “The Biology of the Beholder’s Share: Modeling other People’s Minds,” in *The Age of Insight*, 403-21.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 415-21.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 392ff.

this ability can viewers envision themselves in a painting, re-create the experience of the painting's subject, or of the artist, and compare these experiences with their own in the top-down process. The empathic ability makes it possible to experience a work of art as a source of information about ourselves, others, the world, and even God. In this way art adds to the models people make in their mind to explain what they observe. It functions as an extension of the visual brain.<sup>63</sup> Art provides human beings with an opportunity to try out, as it were, experiences they have not (yet) had in real life, while indicating how meaningful those experiences can be. Moreover, humans are drawn to the artistic portrayal of these experiences because art can provide an “intensification, harmonizing, and fulfillment of possibilities for meaning and growth of meaning.”<sup>64</sup>

Meaning-making in art viewing requires that viewers are able to identify with the painting. As the same time, the opposite ability is required; beholders need the capability of losing themselves in the artwork, i.e. abstracting themselves enough from the immediate, personal interpretation so they may trace additional information provided in, through and about the art work.<sup>65</sup>

### The Role of Attentiveness

One of the functions of the modulating systems of the brain is to enhance

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<sup>63</sup> Jensen, *Arts with the Brain in Mind*, 56.

<sup>64</sup> Johnson, *The Meaning in the Body*, 261.

<sup>65</sup> Kandel, *The Age of Insight*, 192. Kandel draws from the work of Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style* (New York: International University Press, 1908).

alertness.<sup>66</sup> These systems are part of the feedback loop that integrates emotion, imitation and empathy into sensory information. Particularly, the noradrenergic neurons help in paying attention; they also modulate emotions, control the fight-flight response, and play a role in the emotive quality of a memory. Furthermore, “the brain can recruit emotion and conscious attention as aids in decision-making and prediction.”<sup>67</sup> An especially creative state of consciousness can be reached by simultaneously, at some level, being attentive *and* letting the mind meander.<sup>68</sup> The insights and solutions this can bring about apply to art viewing as well. It underscores the importance of looking at the whole as well as the details. Through art viewing the capacity for paying attention can be expanded, a skill which then nourishes other functions of the brain with its ability to focus.<sup>69</sup>

### Cognitive Neuroscience and Engaged Aesthetics

Without forcing cognitive neuroscience and engaged aesthetics into an artificial alliance, I think it is possible to detect the elements of engaged aesthetics in the findings of neuroscience that concern art and religion. The embodied significance of metaphors, the information provided by the senses, and the physical circuitry of the brain with all its processes, fully justify attention to the role of the body in aesthetic and religious

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<sup>66</sup> Kandel, *The Age of Insight*, 432.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 455.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 459, 483.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

meaning-making. The prominence of the visual perception processes and the imagistic work of the right hemisphere make clear the importance of form—literal and figurative—in all cognition. Furthermore, art provides a platform for imaginatively trying out a certain “form”; it allows people to explore what would happen if a certain experience—spiritual or not—is engaged. The activity of foregrounding is present both in paying attention to details, as well as in empathically imagining what the experience means for the other—as subject of an artwork or as maker of the artwork—as well as for ourselves. Since Christians are called to love their neighbors as themselves, exercising empathy is an important skill and practice. The importance of paying attention applies to the brain’s bottom-up and top-down processes as, with more and better information, meaning can more accurately be assigned to the perceptual event. The positive value of the capacity to hold things in tension may be concluded from the importance of ambiguity in the complexity of meaning formation, for the ability to suspend judgement long enough to see someone else’s point of view, and in the capability to expand meaning-making through the increase of empathy.

The processes of signification in aesthetic and religious experiences overlap at the neurological level. They involve sensory information, all levels of cognition, emotions, imitation, empathy, and the resources of the memory, past experiences, and values. It is no wonder then, that religious experiences have been expressed through artistic means since the beginning of time. Conversely, art has been a source of religious experience for many people. Knowing the neurobiological structure that explains this convergence, could it be possible to explore the opportunities art offers for different ways of meaning-

making and apply them to spiritual growth?

### Cognitive Neuroscience and Aesthetic Epistemology

We can now evaluate the various insights from cognitive neuroscience with the stages of aesthetic development. In Stage I, the viewer scans the elements of the artwork quickly and the brain immediately processes this information into the narrative framework, the easiest accessible way of making sense of the data. The stories are directly—and only—related to the viewer’s own experiences. The alternative stories seen by others force the viewer to look again, and to weigh others’ experiences, in order to affirm or reject the new meaning as possible. Encouraged to look for more of what is going on, the viewer starts to focus more on details, which increases the possibility of forming new meaning.

Stage II represents a transition from evaluating the sensory information predominantly through one’s own experience to the formation of a “theory of mind” and a capacity to accept others’ experience as plausible. Hearing the connections that others make with the same artwork expands the viewer’s fund of possible experiences. Art itself is also a fruitful source for vicariously experiencing the emotions the artist expresses, be they the artist’s own feelings or someone else’s. The experiential knowledge gained in this way is a little less personal and therefore less emotional and more distant.

In Stage III, the viewer’s cognition is expanded substantially with a fund of art historical knowledge, and viewers in this stage have enlarged their skills of observation. Since, as Housen reports, categorization is now important to the meaning and message of

the artwork, it seems that the perceptual processes now work their way through a large amount of new information in the bottom-up path, without much experience or memory to guide the top-down path.

However, as more engagement leads to more experience and more memories from which to draw, viewers in Stage IV start to reap the fruits of their art historical work. The added information carries cultural, historical, religious, and emotional value. In addition, viewers now know what to look for, and what the symbolic features mean. All these elements add to the representative images and memories that play a part in the feedback loops. Although the art historical facts are more or less the same for students in the same culture, their individual processing, emotions, and memories of each fact create a plethora of possible connections to form as many conceivable meanings. This stage may require more effort to attain through the study of art history, but the rewards increase exponentially.

Finally, with time and experience, the viewer reaches Stage V. It appears that the process of information gathering runs very smoothly at this point, while the resources for connections and meaning-making are ever expanding. The viewer not only has the pleasurable memory of former encounters with a particular art work, but each new viewing offers opportunities to see and experience something fresh. The viewer experiences the pleasure of seeing the familiar and of making new discoveries. In this stage, beholders know how to find *and* lose themselves in the art work. The viewer is able to pursue the details, as well as to see and evaluate the whole; he or she can call on attention to isolate problems or surprises, while also knowing how to let the mind roam in

order for the unconscious processes of the brain to suggest a solution or new meaning.

### **Maximizing the Commonality of Aesthetic and Religious Experience**

Art and religion have more in common than possibly the subject matter or context: they share the same structure of meaning-making. The metaphoric content of art and religion makes them compatible for cooperative reflection. To use a metaphor for this concept, art is a hospitable place for spiritual significance, because it offers many seats at the table for those who want to have an adventurous dinner out. The complexity of art's metaphors is welcoming to viewers with every level of experience. Aesthetic knowledge can become the vehicle for spiritual meaning, with the appropriate art image, supportive guidance and a willingness to be open.

Even though the first two stages of aesthetic development are most prevalent among adults, the treasures that come from combining the fine observance and art historical knowledge in Stage V are so desirable that it is worth the effort of envisioning a curriculum that provides specific art historical information about selected images. This would enable a Stage I-II viewer to make connections and enjoy the experience of making many more associations—in a Stage IV-V manner. The pleasure this elicits makes the viewer more open to the next art encounter, possibly even encouraging independent study.

### **The Hospitality of Art**

The method suggested above is promising because the goal is not for the viewer

to become a Stage V art connoisseur. Rather, the purpose is to facilitate Stage V-like experiences that will enable transformative spiritual experiences in the hospitable house of art. The connection of religious experience and aesthetic experience is reminiscent of Hans-Georg Gadamer's definition of hermeneutics:

[A tension] is in the play between the traditional text's strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition. *The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between.*<sup>70</sup>

Similarly, meaning-making processes facilitated by art viewing form an *in-between* place for religious experience to occur. The art work then fulfills the role of Gadamer's "text," both strange and familiar at the same time, providing a space to make the connection between what the artist expressed and what the beholder experiences. Gadamer's "historically intended, distanced object" parallels the art object with its art historical features and context, while the "tradition" represents the fund of religious doctrines, narratives, symbolism, and experiences—personal and communal. The in-between "dwelling place," where some amount of dwelling is necessary, is rich with possible interpretations that are meaningful for the individual viewer and at the same time for the community. For these significations to be *intentionally* religious, aesthetic experience needs to be coached into the service of spiritual growth. The activity of meaning-making as it happens in art viewing can be tailored to address what Christians say they believe and how they actually act. That can happen purposefully by the teacher who chooses religious subjects and images that elicit reflection on spiritual topics, connects the

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<sup>70</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 295 (emphasis in original).

artwork to a theological subject or a Bible passage, and asks questions that invite spiritual reflection. This encourages viewers to draw from religious feelings, imagery, experiences, and values in the integrative process. The hospitality of art can bring about spiritual transformation through an aesthetic Christian pedagogy and curriculum.

Does the spiritual transformation potential and the aesthetic pedagogy require particularly a Wesleyan epistemology? I don't think so. However, it would be helpful for the development of a specifically Wesleyan aesthetic Christian education to have affinity with Wesley's epistemology. It is at least worth a short investigation, to which I now turn.

### **Wesley's epistemology**

#### Background<sup>71</sup>

Scholars have found various sources for Wesley's epistemology. He was trained in the Aristotelian tradition and influenced by the empirical philosophy of John Locke and Peter Brown,<sup>72</sup> by the Cambridge Platonist John Norris,<sup>73</sup> and the Scottish physician philosopher George Cheyne.<sup>74</sup> In addition, Wesley drew from the Eastern Fathers, such

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<sup>71</sup> Part of this chapter was submitted for the directed study "Wesley's Aesthetics," Spring 2013.

<sup>72</sup> Scott Crothers and Joe Cunningham, "Wesley's Epistemology in Contemporary Perspective," in *via media philosophy: Holiness Unto Truth. Intersections between Wesleyan and Roman Catholic Voices*, ed. L. Bryan Williams (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2009): 175; Mark Grear Mann, "A Pragmatic Wesleyanism: Peirce, Wesley, and a Nonfoundational Religious Epistemology," *Wesleyan Philosophical Society Online Journal* 1, no. 1, (2002), accessed March 1, 2013, <http://home.snu.edu/~brint/wpsjnl/Mann01.htm>; Laurence Willard Wood, "Wesley's Epistemology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 10 (Spring 1975): 52.

<sup>73</sup> Mann, "A Pragmatic Wesleyanism."

<sup>74</sup> As early as April 30, 1726, Wesley mentioned having read George Cheyne, *Philosophical Principles of Religion: Natural and Revealed* (London: George Strahan, 1725). See Laura Bartels, "John

as Pseudo-Macarius and Ephraem of Syria.<sup>75</sup> Wesley's religious epistemology came about in his particular amalgamating way: "[he] was biblical, orthodox/traditional, analytical/critical, and experimental/practical in his investigation of facts and ideas."<sup>76</sup> All these influences were accompanied by a good dose of commonsense.<sup>77</sup> Although the sources of Wesley's epistemology can be traced, he formed the elements into his own philosophy, fitting to his Anglican tradition, in accordance with his understanding of Scripture and his own experience. Thus, Wesley's epistemology is one of transcendent empiricism: reality can be known by way of reason which interprets what is encountered through the senses; a person's subjective experiences come from the outside because they are based on antecedent reality.<sup>78</sup>

### Wesley and Edwards

Another figure of major influence is Wesley's contemporary and fellow revivalist, Jonathan Edwards.<sup>79</sup> In 1773, Wesley abridged *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746), which he heavily edited and shortened.<sup>80</sup> After excising Calvinistic

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Wesley and Dr. George Cheyne on the Spiritual Senses," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 167-69.

<sup>75</sup> Crothers and Cunningham, "Wesley's Epistemology," 180n24.

<sup>76</sup> John S. Park, "Religious Epistemology: John Wesley and His Contemporaries," in *Holiness as a Root of Morality: Essays on Wesleyan Ethics* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006): 40.

<sup>77</sup> Wood, "Wesley's Epistemology," 52.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>79</sup> See Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 16.

<sup>80</sup> Wesley apparently worked from an earlier abridgment (1762) which a certain William Gordon had reduced to about two-thirds of the original. Wesley himself kept only one-sixth of the original *Treatise*.

teaching, uncharitable language, and terms that could be misunderstood, he streamlined Edwards' verbosity and incorporated Edwards' Scripture references. Wesley endorsed what was left, preserving the "essential thrust of Edwards' work."<sup>81</sup>

### Natural and Spiritual Senses

Wesley agreed with Edwards on the importance of affections: "As the affections not only belong to the human nature, but are a great part of it; so holy affections do not only belong to true religion, but are a very great part of it. ... And as in worldly things, worldly affections are the springs of men's actions; so in religious matters, the spring of their actions is religious affections."<sup>82</sup> These affections, so much part of religious life, require an epistemology that includes "natural" and "spiritual senses." The argument that sense experiences contribute to natural, as well as spiritual, knowledge is based on analogy.<sup>83</sup> Edwards' and Wesley's empirical epistemology was indebted to Locke,

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Wesley also published an abridgment of Edwards' *Faithful Narrative and Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* in 1744, in 1745 an abridgment of *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England*, and in 1768 of *An Account of the Life of the Late Reverend Mr. David Brainerd*. See Richard E. Brantley, "The Common Ground of Wesley and Edwards," *Harvard Theological Review* 83, no. 3 (1990): 276.

<sup>81</sup> Brantley, "The Common Ground," 276. Any passages that still contradicted Wesley's own view—his editing had been hasty—were removed in a second edited version, published after his death in 1827. George S. Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections: His Views on Experience and Emotion and their Role in the Christian Life and Theology* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1989), 140.

<sup>82</sup> John Wesley, *An Extract from a Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, Part 1, § 1.2, in *Christian Library* (1831), accessed March 2, 2013, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/a-christian-library>.

<sup>83</sup> John English makes the point that the concept of spiritual senses can be traced back as far as Plato, who described the transition from darkness to light by way of the physical eye and, analogously, the inward eye. Wesley had studied Plato and others who used terms such as "the eye of the mind," for instance, Macarius, Augustine, John Norris. John English, "John Wesley's indebtedness to John Norris," *Church History* 60, no. 1 (March 1991): 59.

validating spiritual experience and natural experience based on observations from life and through scientific method.<sup>84</sup> However, they deviated from Locke by insisting that spiritual knowledge was not limited to mediation through the mind, but was possible through the natural and spiritual senses. For Wesley, the spiritual senses were the natural senses made “supernatural” through the Holy Spirit, as well as the direct sense experience of the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>85</sup>

Wesley was raised with the idea that direct and immediate knowledge of God is indeed possible.<sup>86</sup> He would have agreed with Norris’s “experience of God in his own life [that] enabled him to state, “that we have such a [direct and immediate] perception of God is declared to be ‘experimentally certain.’”<sup>87</sup> Where Locke separated the Holy Spirit from natural operations, in Edwards and Wesley the natural and spiritual realm were bridged by experience. God’s presence, God’s nature, and the workings of the Holy Spirit could indeed be known in a way that was similar to knowing naturally: namely, by the spiritual senses. However, this epistemology constituted more than analogy. When Wesley—with Edwards—stated that, “Men will trust their God no further than they know him, and they cannot be in the exercise of faith in him one ace further than they have a

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<sup>84</sup> Brantley, 271, 282. Thus, the claim Outler makes, that in the Wesleyan quadrilateral experience refers exclusively to the spiritual experience of the assurance of faith, needs to be expanded. Albert C. Outler, “The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in Wesley,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 16-17. See the section “Wesley and Paying Attention” in chapter 3.

<sup>85</sup> Brantley, 284. See also Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 27-32.

<sup>86</sup> English credits Samuel Sr. and Susanna’s knowledge of Blaise Pascal and Henry Scougal, both of whom Wesley had read himself, with the idea of direct experience of God. English, “John Wesley’s indebtedness,” 62.

<sup>87</sup> English, “John Wesley’s indebtedness,” 63.

sight of his fullness and faithfulness in exercise,” the spiritual senses are exercised not merely *similarly* to natural senses, but *as* natural senses, enlivened by the Holy Spirit to see spiritual reality.<sup>88</sup> Believers “see” God with spiritual eyes, but they also observe the effects of their faith in the life as habits, dispositions and actions change. This is evidence of God’s existence and actions: faith comes *through* experience, and faith exists *as* experience.<sup>89</sup>

Wesley and Edwards avoided the charge of enthusiasm by a careful balance between reasoning and the senses, how they interacted on each other, and the role of the will.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, the proof of experience is in the actions following experiences: “The tendency of grace in the heart to holy practice, is direct; and the connexion close and necessary. True grace is not an inactive, barren thing, for it is, in its very nature, a principle of holy action.”<sup>91</sup> Wesley’s editing and abridging of *Religious Affections* establishes his theological empirical epistemology. That same epistemology is present in the rest of his work, as well. James Thobaben distinguishes three kinds of knowing within Wesley’s writing: first, knowledge of natural phenomena through the natural senses; second, spiritual knowledge that specifically leads to justification when God’s work of

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<sup>88</sup> Brantley, 284.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 287. As Rex Matthews has shown, over time Wesley’s understanding of faith shifts from faith as assent to God’s truth, to faith as trust in God’s love, to faith as the spiritual experience of God’s love. See Rex Matthews, “‘With the eyes of Faith’: Spiritual Experience and the Knowledge of God in the Theology of John Wesley,” in *Wesleyan Theology Today: A Bicentennial Theological Consultation*, ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1985), 406.

<sup>90</sup> Brantley, 279-81; Clapper, 145.

<sup>91</sup> Wesley, *An Extract from a Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, Part 3, §VIII.1, in *Christian Library* (1831), accessed March 2, 2013, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/a-christian-library/>.

prevenient grace provides awareness of sin; and third, knowing through the new spiritual senses, which leads to spiritual growth.<sup>92</sup> All knowing, Wesley believed, is made possible by the grace of God but, at the same time, “active sense involvement” is necessary at all stages.<sup>93</sup>

Wesley was optimistic about the possibility of knowing, but he was also fully aware of the limitations of knowing because of human finitude, human sinfulness, and the vastness of truth there is to be known about God and creation.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, he recognized that “the profundity of divine truth and the wealth of human experience” exceeded human knowledge.<sup>95</sup> His multifaceted epistemology allowed him to be open to the wider community and to consider the perspectives of others and their correction of his own perspective and understanding.<sup>96</sup> Ultimately, for Wesley, the highest goal of human existence is to know God. “Since knowledge is total involvement with reality, this means that to know God is to love God.”<sup>97</sup> The search for knowledge thus becomes the search for holiness, as the believer participates in the triune community of divine love.

We find in Wesley a recognition that the senses, the mind, the will, and the affections are interacting with each other to form human knowledge. The Holy Spirit is at

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<sup>92</sup> James R. Thobaben, “Holy Knowing: A Wesleyan Epistemology,” in *The Death of Metaphysics; the Death of Culture*, ed. Mark J. Cherry (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 100-7.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>94</sup> Mann, “A Pragmatic Wesleyanism.”

<sup>95</sup> Wood, “Wesley’s Epistemology,” 52.

<sup>96</sup> Mann, “A Pragmatic Wesleyanism.”

<sup>97</sup> Wood, “Wesley’s Epistemology,” 54.

work as well, drawing the unbeliever to conversion. After the new birth, the Spirit enables the believer to receive knowledge through spiritual senses—whether directly or by the Spirit at work through the natural senses. The interplay of sensory data with the faculties of the mind and the believer’s experiences is the territory of the Holy Spirit, for every aspect of life. Wesley showed an epistemological humility: what humans know about God, themselves, and the world, is always less than what may be known. In addition, the community of faith provides checks and balances, as well as new insights. Wesley’s optimism about God’s work in the believer’s life constitutes an encouragement to keep learning and growing. Knowledge, though, is not to be an end in itself, but a way to know, love, and serve God, as well as fellow human beings.

### **Conclusion**

I come to the conclusion that Wesley’s comprehensive, transcendent, empirical and positive epistemology is sympathetic to the aesthetic epistemology outlined above. This opens the way for a pedagogy that incorporates the structures and features of the aesthetic development stages to provide transformative experiences. Held accountable by the quadrilateral, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, experience and embodied knowledge can be integrated and contribute to spiritual growth in the Wesleyan way. Art provides a welcomes space for experience and embodied knowledge, for reflection and change. Art viewing offers a cognitive involvement—intellectual, emotional, and empathic—which operates in the “space” between the aesthetic knowledge from the art work and the ideas, feelings, memories, experiences, and values. The process of aesthetic viewing is a fruitful place for transformation because the insights gained are not merely

rational but can be apprehended at a deeply personal and interpersonal level. Engagement with artworks that are appropriate to a Wesleyan sensibility, can offer fruitful opportunities for reflection on beliefs and practices. A pedagogy that is based in a Wesleyan engaged aesthetic can provide the in-depth reflections necessary to reconnect holiness theology with holiness practices, in the same way in which Wesley's espoused and operative theology were indissolubly connected. In the area of Wesleyan aesthetic education, Wesley's practical theology—showing the characteristics of embodiment, form-giving, foregrounding, paying attention and holding in tension—comes together with the neuroscientific evidence for these same characteristics in how human beings create meaning out of their experiences. That confluence provides the possibility of transformative reflection toward congruence of faith-as-beliefs and faith-in-action. What a Wesleyan aesthetic Christian education will entail will be explored in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### WESLEYAN AESTHETIC CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

#### Introduction

John Wesley's life and work are exemplary for the balance of his espoused and operant theology. Not only does this make his theology truly a practical theology, but the connection characterizes his engaged aesthetic. Wesley acknowledged the importance of reason and common sense as sources for insights in religious life, as well as the work of the Holy Spirit, but he also attributed an important role of the affections. For him, one of the most important practices for a holy life was edification—Christian instruction, imperative to unbeliever, new believer, and mature believer alike. As Matthaëi states, “Each member of a Methodist society received instruction in the faith and nurture for holy living in a system whose purpose was behavioral change, spiritual growth, personal interaction, and community transformation.”<sup>1</sup> Twenty-first century Wesleyan Christian education can make use of the insights of cognitive neuroscience and aesthetic epistemology to formulate a pedagogy that facilitates and enhances transformation, as believers examine and bridge the possible gap between what they believe and how they act.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sondra Higgins Matthaëi, *Making Disciples: Faith Formation in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 131.

<sup>2</sup> Recent neuro-psychological research into the occurrence of transformation during the perception and interaction with visual art shows promising possibilities. See Matthew Pelowski, et al., “Move Me, Astonish Me ... Delight My Eyes and Brain: The Vienna Integrated Model of Top-Down and Bottom-up Processes in Art Perception (VIMAP) and Corresponding Affective, Evaluative, and Neurophysiological Correlates,” *Physics of Life Reviews* 21 (2017): 80-125.

In this chapter I will first present adult education theories that have been proposed for transformation. Then I will look at the specific transformative skills nurtured by art education and how aesthetic religious education has tried to incorporate these. After a short look at Wesleyan Christian educators for a more effective adult Christian education, and the role of the Holy Spirit in transformation through art, I will present a proposal for Wesleyan aesthetic Christian education.

### **Transformative Learning Theory**

In the field of adult education, one approach that includes reflection is *transformative learning theory*. The pioneer of this field, Jack Mezirow, defined it as follows:

Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-set) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinion that will prove more true and justified to guide action.<sup>3</sup>

However, transformative learning in this vein focusses on the *rational* process.<sup>4</sup> Others have emphasized and added different facets of learning to the idea of transformative adult education. John Dirkx represents the *deep learning approach*, which includes emotional and intuitive sensitivities in transformative learning: “consideration of the life of the inner world directs our attention to the imaginative and emotional dimensions of our being, of

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<sup>3</sup> Jack Mezirow, *Learning as Transformative: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 7-8.

<sup>4</sup> Dean G. Blevins, “Transformational Teaching Insights from Neuroscience,” *Christian Education Journal* 10, no. 2 (2013): 409.

connecting with and integrating the powerful feelings and images that often arise within the context of our pursuit of intellectual and cognitive growth.<sup>5</sup> While Mezirow's and Dirkx's definitions of transformative learning underscore the adaptive and slowly-evolving character of transformation, Dean points out that Dirkx's *epiphany learning* and Loder's *convictional knowing* go beyond the rational process of learning to acknowledge the possibility of sudden, existential, even mystical changes taking place.<sup>6</sup> Epiphany learning accepts transformation as possible and takes it as the starting point for new insights and meaning to arise, even at the existential level. Although Christian educators often relate this learning to conversion, epiphanic insights do not need to be confined to soteriological events. Other revelatory experiences can also contribute to significant deepening or changes in the Christian's life, leading to tighter cohesion of beliefs and practices. James Loder, who proposed the term convictional knowledge, or transformational logic, agrees that transformation may occur all throughout the believer's life as the Holy Spirit is actively engaged in the work of redemption and renewal.<sup>7</sup>

The underlying assumptions of transformative learning theory, as represented by Mezirow and Dirkx, are humanist, but the contributions of epiphany learning and convictional knowing make transformative learning theory compatible with Christian

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<sup>5</sup> John M. Dirkx, Jack Mezirow, and Patricia Cranton, "Musings and Reflections on the Meaning, Context, and Process of Transformative Learning: A Dialogue between John M. Dirkx and Jack Mezirow," *Journal of Transformative Education*, no. 4 (2006): 128, quoted by Blevins, "Transformational Teaching Insights," 410.

<sup>6</sup> Blevins, "Transformational Teaching Insights," 410-11.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 411; Blevins refers to James E. Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).

education.<sup>8</sup> In the article “Transformational Teaching Insights from Neuroscience,” Blevins highlights three neuroscientific categories that apply to transformational Christian education. The first is critical, creative thinking: “Christian educators can capitalize on the neuro-scientific capacities of people who understand and engage in novel connections and social interactions as necessary preparation for changes of heart and mind.”<sup>9</sup> The second is the emotional environment, which offers a safe and supportive place for reflection, dialogue, and empathy: “the emotionally rich climate invokes not only satisfaction from successful continual learning but also reflection and reciprocity from interpersonal attunement.”<sup>10</sup> The social framework is the third element, for which Blevins draws from James Loder: “the presence of a social community provides opportunities to find correspondence between the transformational moment and the student’s new perspective. People who undergo transformative change require a community to help shape their lives once imbued with new understanding.”<sup>11</sup> The community plays an important role in supporting the initial change so that change can solidify into a permanent transformation.

The recurring aspects in transformative learning theories of critical, creative, affective, self and other-oriented reflection within a social context can readily be

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<sup>8</sup> For the humanist assumptions, see Patricia Cranton and Edward W. Taylor, “Transformative Learning Theory: Seeking a More Unified Theory,” in *The Handbook of Transformative Learning Theory: Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. Edward W. Taylor and Patricia Cranton (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Blevins, “Transformational Teaching Insights,” 414.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 415, Blevins refers to Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*.

recognized in the epistemological elements of aesthetic viewing and in the neurobiology of the perception process. Two factors, however, are different in transformative learning theory, as developed by Mezirow and Dirkx, from that in art viewing. The first factor is the emphasis on the *adaptive* quality of transformation. Theorists contrast this to the kind of education that is focused on adding new knowledge, e.g. historical facts or math equations, which in itself is not necessarily transformative.<sup>12</sup> However, aesthetic epistemology supports the possibility that new knowledge *does* potentially lead to transformation, when, for instance, additional information about art leads to new insights that stirs a memory and triggers new connections. The neuroscience of how the brain process new facts also shows the potential of behavior-changing discernments: the top-down evaluation and construction of meaning always includes emotions and memories.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the theories of epiphany learning and convictional knowing emphasize the possibility of the Holy Spirit conveying a new perspective that induces change.<sup>14</sup>

The second factor is the requirement of a “disorienting dilemma,” an external event or an internal disillusionment, before a person will seek to change.<sup>15</sup> The dilemma

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<sup>12</sup> Tammie M. Grimm, “Holistic and Holy Transformation: The Practice of Wesleyan Discipleship and Transformative Learning Theory” (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2016), 25.

<sup>13</sup> Kandel, “Top-down Processing of Information: Using Memory to Find Meaning,” and “The Deconstruction of Emotion: The Search for Emotional Primitives,” in *The Age of Insight*, 304-329.

<sup>14</sup> One of the humanist assumptions (see note 7 in this chapter) is that “reality is defined by each person.” However, when Christians believe that God constitutes the Reality in which humans participate, then knowledge from *outside* the human perspective—revelation—is possible, and therefore the possibility of new knowledge is always present.

<sup>15</sup> Francis A. Payette, “The Role of the Holy Spirit in Transformational Learning,” *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 3, no. 1 (June 2003), accessed Jan 15, 2018, <http://didache.nazarene.org/index.php/volume-3-1/678-v3n1-transformational/file>. Mezirow’s 2006 definition of transformative learning includes the phrase “the process by which we transform *problematic* frames of reference,” quoted in Blevins, “Transformational Teaching Insights,” 409.

comes about as the learner goes through the process of “deliberate questioning, profound reflection and creative reordering” of thoughts and practices.<sup>16</sup> Within the context of reflection with art, I challenge the *necessity* of confrontation for transformation to take place. The imitative characteristic of experiencing art, where one can “try on” another person’s experience and share those feelings, is more an invitation to change than an impasse which offers no other choice but to transform. Engagement with the artwork provides the viewer a choice to participate on a scale that runs from insouciant to confrontational. Certainly, the art work itself may confront the viewer in subject matter or in execution, and it is possible for the teacher to ask provocative questions.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the participation of the Holy Spirit in the process may lead to conviction. But none of these aspects needs to be present for the viewer to have an “aha moment,” or a transformative insight.

### **Art Education**

Researchers of art education have isolated specific features of aesthetic education. Philosopher Emeritus of the Lincoln Center for the Arts in Education, Maxine Greene, described aesthetic education as

... an intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements with the arts by enabling learners to notice what there is to be noticed, and to lend works of art their lives in such a way that they can achieve them as variously meaningful. When this happens, new connections are

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<sup>16</sup> Grimm, 25.

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Karen Stone, “Art as Prophetic Word,” in *Image and Spirit: Finding Meaning in Visual Art* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2003), 114-26; John W. de Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

made in experience: new patterns are formed, new vistas are opened. ... [This education is] integral to the development of persons—their cognitive, perceptual, emotional and imaginative development.<sup>18</sup>

Educators involved with the Lincoln Center Education identified ten features in high school students, called Capacities for Imaginative Learning.<sup>19</sup> These features of art education dovetail with the aesthetic development recorded by Housen. Lincoln Center Education researchers found that noticing deeply, embodying, and asking questions—in no particular order—were the first skills necessary for the process of forming a mental image. The skills of identifying patterns, making connections, and exhibiting empathy are developed subsequently, creating relations among what is noticed deeply, embodied and questioned. Next emerge the capacities to live with ambiguity, create meaning, and take action, again building on the previous abilities. The last ability, to reflect and assess, permeates all other capabilities and develops alongside them. The imagination—cognitive, affective and social—is at work in the processing and incorporating of all the capacities. Unfortunately, not all children have the advantage of learning these skills because of a lack of art education in K-12 schools. However, if these capacities indeed need to be nurtured in order for people to become integrated, whole beings, then the transformative education of adults needs to include these aesthetic aspects of knowing, learning and teaching.

### **Aesthetic Religious Education**

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<sup>18</sup> Maxine Greene, *Variations on a Blue Guitar: The Lincoln Center Institute Lectures on Aesthetic Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001), 6, quoted in Madeleine Fuchs Holzer, *Aesthetic Education, Inquiry, and the Imagination* (New York: Lincoln Center Institute for the Arts in Education, 2009), 2.

<sup>19</sup> Holzer, 3-7.

To this purpose, several scholars of adult Christian (religious) education have advocated for a more creative, imaginative pedagogy. Maria Harris's *Teaching and the Religious Imagination: An Essay in the Theology of Teaching* is an important example.<sup>20</sup> Harris affirms the possibility of change through imaginative Christian education, as well as its holistic quality: "Essential to the teaching role then, is the work of creating possibilities, of handing on the belief that we have within us the capacity to alter our existence. ... teaching is dependent on the total resources in us, our students, and our environment, all of which go into the making of *our* worlds."<sup>21</sup> In her dissertation "The Aesthetic Dimension in Redefining Religious Education," Harris argues that theology and pedagogy share an aesthetic dimension.<sup>22</sup> Religion, she says, now contains "a necessary ambiguity because of the aesthetic," as well as being "personal, fleshly, and rooted in experience and feeling."<sup>23</sup> The aesthetic does not add these features to religion, but makes these characteristics explicit and conscious. Similarly, the aesthetic in pedagogy emphasizes that knowledge is a physical and social experience.<sup>24</sup>

Others have written on the aesthetic in Christian education from different

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<sup>20</sup> Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination: An Essay in the Theology of Teaching* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987). Others include Gloria Durka and Joanmarie Smith, eds. *Aesthetic Dimensions of Religious Education* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979); Gabriel Moran, *Interplay: A Theory of Religion and Education* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 1981); Mary Elizabeth Moore, "Education as Creative Power," in *Handbook of Whiteheadian Process Thought*, ed. Michel Weber and Will Desmond (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2008), 199-214.

<sup>21</sup> Harris, 4 (emphasis in original).

<sup>22</sup> Maria Harris, "The Aesthetic Dimension in Redefining Religious Education," (EdD diss., Columbia University, 1971).

<sup>23</sup> Harris, "The Aesthetic Dimension," 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

viewpoints. Elizabeth Caldwell, for instance, promotes art making in the class room for spiritual growth, while Barbara Javore focuses on the role of creativity in spiritual life and in art making in the context of Christian education.<sup>25</sup> Frank Nelsen lays a theoretical foundation for the incorporation of art in Christian education.<sup>26</sup> No one, however, has made a connection between the purposes of transformative learning theory, arts education, Christian education, and the evidence from neuroscience on how meaning-making works.

The activity of meaning-making as it happens in art viewing can be tailored for Christian education by addressing what Christians say they believe and how they actually act. That can occur purposefully, initiated by the teacher who chooses religious subjects and images that elicit reflection on spiritual topics. The teacher can also connect the artwork to a theological subject or a Bible passage and ask questions that invite spiritual reflection. Spiritual meaning-making can also occur indirectly—not initiated by the teacher—when the viewers themselves draw from religious feelings, imagery and experiences in the integrative process. In all of these operations, revelatory insights can lead to change of the status quo.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Caldwell, “The Aesthetic Dimension in Faith Formation,” *Religious Education* 110, no. 5 (2015): 472-75; Barbara B. Javore, “In Partnership with God: Recovering Creativity in the Methods and Practices of Christian Education” (PhD diss., Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> Frank C. Nelsen, “The Aesthetic Dimension of Christian Education,” *Religious Education* 66, no. 5 (1971): 385-89.

<sup>27</sup> The spiritual transformative power of art is a popular topic. See, for instance, Nancy J. Azara, *Spirit Taking Form: Making a Spiritual Practice of Making Art* (New Beach, ME: Read Wheel, 2002); Tom Crockett, *The Artist Inside: A Spiritual Guide to Cultivating Your Creative Self* (New York: Broadway Books, 2000); Leslie Davenport and Martin L. Rossman, *Transformative Imagery: Cultivating the Imagination for Healing, Change, and Growth* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2016); Cathy A. Malchiodi, *The Soul's Palette: Drawing on Art's Transformative Powers* (Boston: Shambhala, 2002);

In the book *Explorations in Art, Theology and Imagination*, Michael Austin posits that in art viewing, viewers give themselves creatively to the creation of new meaning that arises in the meeting of the beholder and the art work.<sup>28</sup> What transpires in the interaction of seeing the artwork is nothing less than a revelation. For Austin, revelation is “some kind of unveiling in which what was once concealed is now laid bare.”<sup>29</sup> While not every discovery in a work of art will be of existential depth, some revelations can give us insights of a transcendent nature:

In the experience of art we must learn how to dwell upon the work in a specific way. When we dwell upon the work, there is no tedium involved, for the longer we allow ourselves, the more it displays its manifold riches to us. The essence of our temporal experience is learning how to tarry in this way. And perhaps it is the only way that is granted to us finite beings to relate to what we call eternity.<sup>30</sup>

Viewers become beholders and witnesses of something new, to which they have contributed themselves. This is what makes the meaning-making of art viewing so intensely personal. And yet the universality of how human beings make meaning at the neurological level, makes it possible for others to recognize some of the same insights features, emotions, symbolism, and ideas. Communal art viewing adds new possibilities

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Shaun McNiff, *Art Heals: How Creativity Cures the Soul* (Boston: Shambhala, 2004); Tona Pearce Myers, *The Soul of Creativity: Insights into the Creative Process* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999); Beverly J. Shamana, *Seeing in the Dark: A Vision of Creativity & Spirituality* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001); Heather C. Williams, *Drawing as a Sacred Activity: Simple Steps to Explore Your Feelings and Heal Your Consciousness* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2002); Vinita Hampton Wright, *The Soul Tells a Story: Engaging Creativity with Spirituality in the Writing Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> Michael R. Austin, *Explorations in Art, Theology and Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2014), 133-34.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 134.

<sup>30</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 45, quoted in Austin, 136.

of meaning.

### **The Holy Spirit and the Aesthetic**

Theologian Patrick Sherry argues that most theological aesthetics have focused on the Incarnation as the rationale for the arts in the field of theology. He, however, accentuates the role of the Holy Spirit in the apprehension of all beauty and of the arts.<sup>31</sup> Sherry encourages more reflection on and with natural and created beauty “for the good of the whole church,” because he believes this can enliven theology and bring more understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in the world, “as well as affecting the ways in which we regard the world and the fruits of human creativity.”<sup>32</sup> In a similar way, Stephen Guthrie calls attention to the Holy Spirit’s activity in and through art.<sup>33</sup> He recognizes parallels in how the Holy Spirit and the artist create as an emerging process. The Spirit makes people more fully human through, among other things, the aesthetic domain.<sup>34</sup> Renewing and completing are characteristics of the Holy Spirit’s eschatological work of beautifying—work in which the arts have their part.

Christian Parker writes more on the eschatological character of the Holy Spirit: the Spirit is given *now* as a first-fruit of God’s Kingdom and is, at the same time, drawing

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<sup>31</sup> Patrick Sherry, “The Beauty of God the Holy Spirit,” *Theology Today* 64 (2007): 12. See also Patrick Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Norwich: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> Sherry, “The Beauty of God the Holy Spirit,” 13.

<sup>33</sup> Stephen R. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human* (Grand Rapids, MI, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 177-95.

all of creation to the *not-yet* of the fulfillment of the Kingdom.<sup>35</sup> All revelation of beauty and meaning—in nature and cultural creations—is part of the work of the Holy Spirit to bring everything under Christ (Col. 1:15-20).<sup>36</sup> In that role, the Holy Spirit mediates meaning between the work of art and the viewer. Parker compares this to Gadamer’s fusion of horizons, an intersection where new meaning arises.<sup>37</sup> He also argues that Gadamer’s “space of in-between” is the place where the Spirit is present. Parker brings to this concept the relationality of the Holy Spirit to indicate that the “conversation” between artwork and art viewer is made possible by the presence of the Holy Spirit.<sup>38</sup> Without claiming that all artistic inspiration comes from the Holy Spirit, or that new meaning is given only through the Holy Spirit, I want to acknowledge that art viewing offers that space of meaning-making where the Holy Spirit can actively interrelate ideas, feelings, memories, values, and past experiences to create a transformative religious experience toward holiness and wholeness. The power of images is, as it were, harnessed to serve spiritual purposes. Instead of the goal of art appreciation or acquiring critical learning skills, art viewing is then infused with the pneumatological commitment to holy love and fulfillment: it arouses and satisfies a deep longing for connection and wholeness.

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<sup>35</sup> Christian Parker, “The Holy Spirit in the Arts: A Pneumatological Now-and-not-yet Approach to Beauty,” *Colloquium: The Australian & New Zealand Theological Review* 46, no. 2 (November 2014): 208.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Hans-George Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 307, quoted in Parker, 214.

<sup>38</sup> Parker, 216.

### Wesleyan Aesthetic Christian Education

Wesley marked three things as conducive to the glorification of God and the edification of the Church: “a service so administered as may inform the mind, engage the affections, and increase devotion.”<sup>39</sup> His holistic approach to worship and education of the Church is worthy of reconsideration: it involves the whole person—mind, body and spirit. Wesley’s goals for adult education, through the meetings of societies, bands and classes, were equally holistic: “spiritual renewal, mutual accountability, mutual responsibility, and Christian practice in the world.”<sup>40</sup> Together, the attainment of these goals would help achieve the ultimate purpose of the Christian life, namely holiness of heart and life to the honor of God.<sup>41</sup> In emulation of Wesley’s educational commitments, several Wesleyan scholars and practitioners of Christian education have called for a more holistic and transformative approach to spiritual formation. Some focus on the characteristics that make Christian education Wesleyan;<sup>42</sup> others examine specific elements from Wesley’s own educational practices, such as small group-based education

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<sup>39</sup> Wesley, Letter to a Roman Catholic (July 18, 1749), section III, Reply to Question 31, *Letters, Essays, Dialogs and Addresses*, in *Works* (Jackson), 10:102.

<sup>40</sup> Dean G. Blevins, “John Wesley and the Means of Grace: An Approach to Christian Religious Education” (PhD diss., Claremont School of Theology, 1999), 60. Blevins refers to Henry Knight’s work, “The Presence of God in the Christian Life: A Contemporary Understanding of John Wesley’s Means of Grace” (PhD diss., Emory University, 1987), 139-43.

<sup>41</sup> See Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 22.

<sup>42</sup> E.g., Diane Leclerc and Mark A. Maddix, “Wesleyan Integration: A Distinctive Philosophy of Education,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 45, no 2 (Fall 2010): 125-35; Donald A.D. Thorsen, “The Wesleyan Impulse in Teaching,” *The Asbury Journal* 63, no. 2 (2008): 49-58.

and accountability,<sup>43</sup> or the preeminence of the means of grace for formation.<sup>44</sup> An alternative approach is followed by those who propose certain educational theories for Wesleyan education, for instance Tammie Grimm’s exploration of transformative learning theory, or Beverly Hall’s proposal to facilitate Christian formation through the combination of transformational education techniques with an organizational development theory called Appreciative Inquiry.<sup>45</sup>

An engaged aesthetic pedagogy offers a methodology of learning and teaching that complements the emphases of other Wesleyan scholars, whether that accent is the preservation of a Wesleyan philosophy of education (Leclerc and Maddix, Thorsen), mediating grace (Blevins, Blevins and Maddix), meeting the conditions of transformative learning theory (Grimm, Hall), or organizing believers in accountability groups (Matthaei, Henderson). Engaged aesthetic pedagogy provides the *manner* in which reflection takes place—it offers the mental, affective, and imaginative space of transformation. Since the whole person is invited to participate in this pedagogy, it provides the resources of the whole person, and it also *addresses* the whole person: an important factor for real change to take place.

In engaged aesthetic art viewing, the teacher will take students through an

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<sup>43</sup> E.g. Matthaei, *Making Disciples*, Sondra Higgins Matthaei, *Formation in Faith: The Congregational Ministry of Making Disciples* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008); D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Wilmore, KY: Rafiki Books, 1997).

<sup>44</sup> E.g. Blevins, “John Wesley and the Means of Grace”; Dean G. Blevins and Mark A. Maddix, *Discovering Discipleship: Dynamics of Christian Education* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2010).

<sup>45</sup> Grimm, “Holistic and Holy Transformation”; Beverly Hall, “What Do Methodists Need to ‘Serve the Present Age’ and ‘Fulfill our Calling’?: Transformational Education and Appreciative Inquiry” (paper presented at the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies, 2007).

experience of guided viewing, in a particular order. During that process the viewers will be asked to notice specific features of the art work, to express the emotion of the artwork or imitate a posture, and then to give a first interpretation of what is going in the painting. This part involves noticing carefully, and embodying; it is Stage I of observing and narrating. This part usually elicits questions from students to clarify what they are seeing, such as “What is behind the man’s arm?” or “Is that black blob a hole or a shadow?” In the second part, the teacher asks the students to notice shapes. The repetition of forms is an expression of significance and unification—since the artist chose to portray the design in this way, what does that do to the painting?

Another question is about movement, of eyes, hands, bodies, light, and actions. Movements are imbued with meaning—universal human significance and specific meaning portrayed by the artist. For instance, outstretched hands evoke the emotion of pleading, of needing help, of vulnerability, which leads to questions such as what is the subject asking for, how likely is the other to fulfill this need, why did the artist express such vulnerability? These are the activities of identifying patterns, making connections, and exhibiting empathy; they deepen observation and introduce the artist’s intention, which helps the viewers form a theory of mind—Stage II of aesthetic development. The third step in art viewing involves the viewers incorporating what other people see and interpretations other’s make on the basis of the same or similar information.

In this phase, the teacher can ask questions that relate the art work to a spiritual issue, Bible passage, or a life practice. The viewers consider the questions in light of the information from the art work, and a new layer of meaning can be formed. Group

viewing not only enhances the observation process, it also challenges viewers to suspend judgment and entertain the possibility that other interpretations exist. Meaning arises as each viewer processes the visual and interpretive information with her or his individual emotions, experiences, values, and memories. The Holy Spirit may prompt connections and insights at a profoundly spiritual level. Depending on the depth of the experience, the viewer may feel moved to action. In this phase, the skill of holding information and meaning in ambiguity is exercised; the imagination stretches to create meaning out of the experience, and subsequently, possible courses of action surface. This is another part of the interpretation phase of Stage II.

From here on, the process of reflecting, assessing, and re-interpreting can be enhanced by providing art historical information about the painting that can change the viewer's point of view.<sup>46</sup> With each piece of data, the steps of the first three phases will be engaged again: noticing something new, feeling new emotions, asking different questions, seeing new patterns and connections, receiving new insights into another's experience, finding new ambiguities to embrace, new meaning and possible new actions to consider. The process can elicit many new discoveries, depending on the richness of meaning and visual information in the painting, the scripted questions, the receptivity and engagement of the students, and the purposes of the Holy Spirit. At this point, some of the skills of Stage III and IV become part of the experience, such as increased critical thinking, more integration of the emotions, and a more fluent processing of all the information. When teacher and students participate in several of these viewing

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<sup>46</sup> See example two in Appendix A.

adventures, viewers become more and more literate regarding the formal art elements. They will make connections with former art viewing experiences and information, and the process of making connections and meaning will become more familiar. In time, the advantages of Stage V may develop: the pleasure experienced in the art viewing experience, seeing art works as potential “friends” and conversation partners, being able to balance the formal information with personal experiences in a fluent, intuitive manner.

The supportive environment and the dynamics of developing insights as a group or developing individual insights which are shared with the group, enhance the possibilities of accountability. This in turn helps solidify transformational insights into transformed practices. The gap between expressed beliefs and practiced beliefs can be addressed in art viewing through the subject of the art work and/or by the guiding questions. He Qi’s *Flight into Egypt*, discussed in Appendix A, illustrates this: the subject of the painting is the escape of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to Egypt to avoid Herod’s plan to kill all young boys (Matt. 2:13-15). The subject matter can be presented to call attention to Jesus’ status as a refugee.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, participants in the contemplation of this painting can be asked to link Jesus’ homelessness to the plight of refugees in the twenty-first century. Depending on the context of the congregation, a follow-up question may make the connection between the painting and the contemporary situation, and inquire how the participants can minister to refugees as if they ministered to Jesus himself (Matt.

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<sup>47</sup> Besides the theme of being driven from one’s home, this Scripture passage highlights other motifs, such as Jesus’ vulnerability as human being, Joseph’s obedience to God, Herod’s power lust, the role of Egypt in Israel’s *Heilsgeschichte*, and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. This is indicative of the richness of meaning in the Scripture passage, reflected also in the art subject. Depending on the educational purpose, one, some or all of the themes can be discussed.

25:40). In this way, the art viewing becomes an aesthetic theological reflection, where beliefs and practices—in this example, about refugees—are scrutinized for their value and congruence, possibly leading to new insights and practices.

Engaged aesthetic methodology provides the integration of experiential, practical and cognitive knowing that Wesley appreciated for spiritual growth. However, a pedagogy that includes art viewing is not a panacea—it does not negate the need for thoughtful content that is faithful to the Wesleyan heritage, with the particular Wesleyan role for grace, the supportive community, and actions that accompany spiritual insights. Such a way of learning and teaching needs the scaffolding of transformative adult learning: “the presence of the other, reflective discourse, a mentoring community, and opportunities for committed action.”<sup>48</sup> After indicating several possible limitations of an aesthetic Christian education for Wesleyans, I will give two examples of what such a pedagogy might look like.

### **Limitations of Engaged Aesthetic Christian Education**

Several factors can challenge the validity or implementation of an engaged aesthetic pedagogy. First, the Protestant suspicion of images could fuel resistance to the inclusion of art in Christian education. The echoes of Protestant iconoclasm are clearly audible today—some people still consider the portrayal of the members of the Trinity in

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<sup>48</sup> Laurent A. Parks Daloz, “Transformative Learning for the Common Good,” in Jack Mezirow, *Learning as Transformative: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 112, quoted in Hall, “What Do Methodists Need,” 3.

any form to be idolatry.<sup>49</sup> Although the Reformers did not forbid all art, a distrust of images is pervasive as the iconoclastic legacy in Western modernity.<sup>50</sup> It is possible that some Wesleyans share the conviction, that art that depicts the divinity trespasses the second commandment, or they may implicitly be suspicious of visual representations.

Secondly, some people object to the elitism of art.<sup>51</sup> Housen described people who had reached Stage V as “above average in terms of intelligence,” with “wisdom and measure,” and they had all been immersed in the arts for a number of years.<sup>52</sup> This, combined with a higher aesthetic development in middle class research subjects than in lower class subjects, may affirm the idea that art is elitist.<sup>53</sup> However, Housen’s research showed that the *development* of aesthetic knowing was independent of class, when the exposure rate was the same.<sup>54</sup> The difference in classes points to the extent of exposure. However, museum studies do suggest that working-class members are less likely to seek

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<sup>49</sup> See, for instance, “Why Did John Calvin and the Reformers Forbid All Images of Divine Persons?,” *The Reformed Church in the United States*, accessed January 18, 2018, <http://www.rcus.org/why-did-john-calvin-and-the-reformers-forbid-all-images-of-the-divine-persons/>.

<sup>50</sup> David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 145.

<sup>51</sup> Housen included the classification of socio-economic status in her initial research. She found a variance of about half a stage: the aesthetic development of middle-class subjects was only slightly higher (Stage II/III) than subjects in the lower class (Stage II); this difference increased to almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  stage during the adult years. Exposure to art makes the largest difference in aesthetic development, in both lower and middle class, showing parallel rates of growth. Housen, “Eye of the Beholder,” 102, 124-33.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>53</sup> Yenawine points out that the natural environment of art, the “art world,” can be physically removed, as well as emotionally cold and unwelcome. “Both the lack of accessible meanings and the off-putting look of much art contribute to a sense that art is an elitist enterprise, perhaps even a scam.” Nevertheless, art is too important to reject too easily. It deserves some effort, because art continues to address human beings. See Philip Yenawine, *How to Look at Modern Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991), 13-14.

<sup>54</sup> Housen, “Eye of the Beholder,” 124-33.

out formal paintings than their age counterparts in the middle class.<sup>55</sup> Clearly, there are more and bigger societal issues at play than purely the encounter with art.<sup>56</sup>

Thirdly, a comment I regularly hear when teaching with art is, “I am not creative.” While few people can draw like Michelangelo, the mere process of making sense of the world is a creative and imaginative process—to that extent, every human being is creative. Reflecting on art engages these processes intuitively; at some level all people are creative and have imagination. The challenge of a curriculum that includes art viewing is to start with an accessible art work that yet has enough intrigue to give viewers a pleasurable experience in a supportive environment.<sup>57</sup> The objective is to entice them toward participation in more and more challenging viewing experiences with an open attitude. Nevertheless, some people apparently are not able make connections with art. Dr. Barry Lord, licensed psychotherapist and former Dean of Southern California Seminary, has studied the brain and concluded that in some traumatic circumstances, young children do not build the necessary neurological pathways for relational connecting. Lord attributes an inability in adulthood to engage with art to this lack of neural pathways.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>56</sup> Art that seeks to counter this elitism includes folk art, mural art of, for instance, Diego Rivera, and the art of the Harlem Renaissance painters.

<sup>57</sup> Philip Yenawine recommends starting with the most intricate and fascinating art works: “in visual art it is easiest to start at the top: the more visually and intellectually rich the work, the more there is to grasp and ponder, perhaps especially for the novice.” Yenawine, *How to Look at Modern Art*, 7. Nevertheless, the intricate and fascinating works still need to be accessible for beginners, offering a satisfying experience that invites more looking.

<sup>58</sup> Personal interview with Dr. Barry Lord on June 14, 2017, in Wilmore, KY.

A fourth challenge to engaged aesthetic pedagogy is that teachers need training in the specific format of guiding questions and information. The implementation of engaged aesthetic pedagogy will require a scripted curriculum with a library of images, and a teacher who is comfortable enough with the material to improvise when necessary. The book series *Imaging the Word: An Arts and Lectionary Resource*, Vol. 1-3 and Eileen Daily's *Beyond the Written Word: Exploring Faith through Christian Art* are encouraging examples of resources for spiritually reflective encounters with art.<sup>59</sup>

The final limitation is the unpredictability of the outcomes of art viewing. Because the connections and transformative insights are laden with personal memories, feelings, experiences, and values, it is impossible to predict what students will see and conclude—or if they even make any significant associations. Furthermore, the activity of the Holy Spirit is unpredictable. It is risky to invite art into the classroom, with a wide range of possible outcomes in the process of viewing. And, based on the literature on teaching with art, it is likely that something will happen because images can be powerful.<sup>60</sup> When viewers—teacher and students alike—are invited into the hospitality of

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<sup>59</sup> Kenneth T. Lawrence, et al., compilers, *Imaging the Word: An Arts and Lectionary Resource*, vol. 1-3 (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1994-1996), these volumes contain lectionary passages, guiding questions, reflections and poetry; Eileen M. Daily, *Beyond the Written Word: Exploring Faith through Christian Art* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2005) and Teaching Guide for *Beyond the Written Word: Exploring Faith through Christian Art* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2005), the student booklet includes a short introduction to Christian art and art viewing, and twenty-one color reproductions of Christian art from different eras and areas of the world, each with a short caption. The teaching guide contains a model for teaching with art, information on what to look for in and how to look at a painting, four lesson plans to be used with the imagery in the student booklets, and more art historical information on the paintings used. The images in Daily's book all have Christian content, in *Imaging the Word* most of the images are expressly Christian.

<sup>60</sup> Until the Reformation, images were almost exclusively religious as purveyors of a religious worldview. Now, with the inundation of images in daily life, secular images “do not present an orderly spiritual universe of being, reality, and value but rather attempt to capture – break off – a piece of the

art together with the Holy Spirit, the guided viewing process can be expected to lead to new discoveries.

### **Aesthetic Christian Education Scripts**

This dissertation provides a theoretical foundation that argues for the inclusion of art viewing in Wesleyan adult Christian education. It is outside the scope of the current work to provide the details of a curriculum of teaching with art in a Wesleyan Christian educational setting. However, I want to highlight some specific elements of cognitive neuroscience that illuminate the aesthetic Christian education script, and in Appendix A I include two examples that may indicate the direction of a Wesleyan aesthetic curriculum.

### **The Neuroscience of Art Viewing Scripts**

Engaged aesthetic art viewing will require a structure of guiding questions, similar to the training for Visual Training Strategies or, in the field of Christian education for children, Godly Play.<sup>61</sup> The steps in the art viewing process are analogous to the steps involved in visual perception in the brain. By breaking the intuitive pathways of bottom-

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infinite longing of a person and disperse it in the acquisition of an immediate satisfaction.” Miles warns that people are no longer trained to evaluate the meaning of the images they see and they are therefore more prone to being seduced into values and actions that become idolatrously life-orienting, but not life-giving. Margaret R. Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 131. The skills learned and trained in art viewing as part of aesthetic Christian education, are transferable to other images, symbols and metaphors. Visual literacy and fluency may turn out to be a necessary skill for the formation of a Christian worldview. The unpredictability of classroom outcomes may make the teaching risky, but the risk of not learning these skills is much greater.

<sup>61</sup> See VTS, accessed January 20, 2018, <https://vtshome.org/training/>; and “U.S. Training Schedule,” Godly Play Foundation, accessed January 20, 2018, <https://www.godlyplayfoundation.org/godly-play-training/us-training-schedule/>.

up information gathering and top-down meaning-making, the viewer intensifies, as it were, the unconscious neurological actions involved in perception. I will look at what happens neurologically when the viewer slows down, when the brain perceives lines, contrast, edges, and body parts, what role the emotions play, and how the brain's reward system is impacted by what we see.

### Slowing Down

Research has shown that people spend an average of 17 seconds looking at a work of art in a museum; for a painting as famous as the Mona Lisa—with whom most people are already familiar—the time of looking is only 15 seconds.<sup>62</sup> The brain is built to process vital information in milliseconds, discarding many details in order to work with the most significant data, from cues of past experiences. The first order of business in a pedagogy of art viewing is slowing down. When viewers look more deliberately, they are able to observe more details of the objects portrayed and make more connections to previous information about those objects, and about experiences with those objects.

Viewers need to learn that the visual data presented by an art object is not the same as observing a situation in daily life: “In viewing art, the brain does not immediately know which details are relevant or not.”<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, in the perception process the top-down thoughts work rapidly, and more consciously, guided by

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<sup>62</sup> “The average time people look at a painting,” The Angel Orensanz Foundation, accessed January 22, 2018, <https://orensanznyc.wordpress.com/tag/the-average-time-people-look-at-a-painting/>.

<sup>63</sup> Eric R. Kandel, *The Age of Insight. The Quest to Understand the Unconscious in Art, Mind and Brain: From Vienna 1900 to the Present* (New York: Random House, 2012), 312-13.

expectations and representational models in a hierarchal manner, while the bottom-up thoughts work unconsciously, in a non-hierarchical way. The unconscious thinking pathway integrates the information in a slower fashion, but it is better at putting the information together into new arrangements and variations.<sup>64</sup> Slowing down to look longer and with more attention therefore pays off with several rewards: seeing more details, being able to incorporate more information that turns out to be relevant and giving the bottom-up process more time to integrate the information into new configurations. Also, with more time and attention, the top-down pathway can involve more memories and experiences into the formation of meaning.

### Lines, Contrast, and Edges

Distinguishing lines, contrast, and edges is learned cognitively in the first three months of a human's life.<sup>65</sup> The brain assigns object content to contours. Illusionistic



images which depict, for instance, a vase and two faces at the same time, can be detected by the brain only one image at a time.<sup>66</sup> The contours are assigned either to the vase or to the faces. Seeing both cannot happen at the same time, but only

consecutively. Something similar happens when the brain supplies missing information

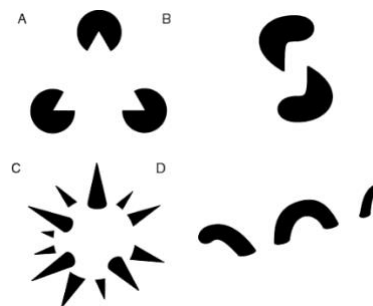
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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 469.

<sup>65</sup> Eric Jensen, *Arts with the Brain in Mind* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001), 52.

<sup>66</sup> "Rubin 2," Wikimedia, accessed January 22, 2018, <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b5/Rubin2.jpg>.

because it completes the image.<sup>67</sup> And yet, these whole pictures are constructed out of a mosaic of information, gained from the few milliseconds the eyes focus on each part of an image.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, the features of an images are processed differently in the brain on the first view than when the image is seen again.<sup>69</sup> These characteristics of the visual process make it interesting to look and re-look at lines, contrasts and edges with attentiveness, to appreciate in a deliberate way what the artist is trying to convey, to look beyond the surface of the initial visual information, and to appreciate what is received by the viewer.



### Body Parts

Faces, hands and bodies are perceived as “specific Gestalt percepts.”<sup>70</sup> For the face this means that rather than putting a complete picture together out of parts, the brain processes information about faces from a template.<sup>71</sup> The brain template for a face consists of an oval with two dots for eyes, a vertical line for a nose, and a horizontal line

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<sup>67</sup> “Reification,” Wikipedia, accessed January 22, 2018, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Reification.jpg>.

<sup>68</sup> Kandel, *The Age of Insight*, 284, 316.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 386. Interestingly, though, “we experience a similar response in the brain when we encounter an object for the first time and when we recall that object from memory,” (313).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 287, 302.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 287. In studies with monkeys, a circle with two dots and a horizontal stripe were enough for the places in the brain dedicated to facial recognition to light up.

for mouth. However, a face can only be identified when it is upright.<sup>72</sup> Seeing faces is the expertise of the bottom-up pathway: “Faces are among the most informative stimuli we ever perceive: Even a split-second glimpse of a person’s face tells us their identity, sex, mood, age, race, and direction of attention.”<sup>73</sup> The brain will register the expression of a face even before perceiving the identifying markers.

While the face indicates emotion, the hands and body give information on how a person is coping with that emotion.<sup>74</sup> The hands and body are, like the face, immediately perceived as a unified whole. The implied movements of hands, body and especially of the eyes, are particularly revealing. Part of the brain determines where the observed person focuses, adding another source of information. “The direction of a face’s gaze and its emotional expression combine to capture the beholder’s attention.”<sup>75</sup> By paying explicit attention to faces, hands and bodies, gestures, gaze, and implied movements, the viewers can gain information consciously that is normally processed unconsciously, thereby fueling new insights.

Through the mirror-neurons, visual perception can relay the information from observations as if the viewer undergoes what is seen. This is how we can step empathically into a painting. Kandel, when discussing a painting by Egon Schiele, reveals that

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

when a viewer unconsciously imitates the distorted body posture in a Schiele self-portrait, he or she begins to enter the private world of Schiele's emotions, for the beholder's body is the stage on which Schiele's depiction of emotions pay out. ... For the sensitive viewer, looking at a Schiele or [Oskar] Kokoschka portrait is not just an act of perception, it is a powerful emotional experience as well.<sup>76</sup>

The pedagogical exercise of physically replicating the gestures or postures portrayed in an image, can bring these unconscious imitations to consciousness and amplify the emotions expressed by the face, hands and body.

### Emotions

The visual perception process includes unconscious emotional reactions and conscious feelings.<sup>77</sup> Colors can evoke emotions—up to 100 milliseconds before we distinguish the form or movement of the object, analogous to the perception of the face's emotional quality before the features that identify the face. “In both cases, our brain processes aspects of the image that relate to emotional perception more rapidly than aspects that relate to form, thus setting the emotional tone for the form—the object or the face—confronting us.”<sup>78</sup> While the unconscious constantly adjusts the feelings evoked by the information from the scanning eyes, the conscious experience of emotion requires the viewer to pay attention to the different qualities of the image.<sup>79</sup> The role of emotional expressiveness in art is that it may provide the viewer with information about the

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 341.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 345.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 352, 451.

other's—the artist or the portrayed person—mood and psychology.<sup>80</sup> This is a vital function of viewing art: vicariously to undergo and then to evaluate the human experience of someone else.

Engaged aesthetic also relies on the theory of mind: to be able to empathize with other people's feelings, thoughts, aspirations, and circumstances. Human beings care about art because, according to Dennis Dutton, it gives us “some of the most profound, emotionally moving experiences available to human beings,” experiences that exercise and increase our social capacities.<sup>81</sup> Art viewing provides a way to gain a new perspective based on vicarious experiences, where viewers can “try on” different events, challenges, relationships, and solutions to problems.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, beholders can project their own emotions onto the painted subject or the artist.<sup>83</sup> Here too, the process of paying attention can bring clarification and insights.

### Rewards

The bottom-up process of the brain is modulated by six systems that influence arousal, mood, learning, social behavior, and control of the autonomic nervous system. Each system has its own area of operating, but when they work together, they can

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 392.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 442.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

produce complex emotional states.<sup>84</sup> In the last chapter, I highlighted the role of the noradrenergic system which regulates the attention and the remembrance of the emotional content of an event.<sup>85</sup> Another system important in art viewing, is the dopaminergic system, responsible for mediating rewards.<sup>86</sup> Rewards are “objects, stimuli, activities, or internal physical states that have positive value for a person. . . . They ensure subjective feelings of pleasure and contribute to positive emotion. They act as positive reinforcers, increasing the frequency or intensity of behavior that leads to realizing an objective.”<sup>87</sup> This system responds to rewards, but even stronger to *predicators* of reward in an inverse way: when the actual reward is the same as the predictor, behavior does not change. However, when the reward is different from what was predicted—by error or surprise—this, together with the noradrenergic system, induces lasting change in behavior.<sup>88</sup> “Learning occurs,” concludes Kandel, “when an actual outcome differs from the predicted outcome,” therefore he calls dopamine “the teaching signal.”<sup>89</sup> The enjoyment of art viewing, ventures Kandel, may be based in how dopaminergic neurons react to anticipated pleasure.<sup>90</sup> However, the top-down process also adds to the pleasure with memories of other enjoyable experiences.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 422-23.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 432.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 426.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 425.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 427, 432.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 427-28.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 428.

For learning to be effective, an aesthetic pedagogy can capitalize on the rewards that come from solving puzzles, surprises and unexpected outcomes. A delicate balance is necessary between, on the one hand, the accessibility of the image that makes the metaphors, symbolism, and ambiguity available and, on the other hand, a level of effort that leads to reward, in order for the art viewing to be enjoyable and a learning experience. For this reason, images need to be chosen carefully. Representational art offers accessibility, but art that uses abstraction, exaggeration, unrealistic use of colors, is of greater interest and holds the viewers' attention longer. Paintings that offer an interesting experience invite a return visit, enhance the aesthetic response, and become friends.

### Two Example Scripts

In this dissertation, I have laid the foundation for an engaged aesthetic approach to Christian education, based on the congruence of Wesley's beliefs and practices. The argument that scripted art viewing can be transformative, especially in unifying beliefs and practices, clamors for a curriculum that makes this claim reality. Unfortunately, the construction of engaged aesthetic Christian education material lies outside the scope of this dissertation. It will take a dedicated effort to develop a curriculum that specifically targets areas where beliefs and actions appear disconnected. Perhaps an even better approach is to train teachers in the methodology, so that they can choose the appropriate art tailored to the challenges their congregations are facing. Nevertheless, a small demonstration of the possibilities is in order.

Appendix A contains two example scripts of art viewing that give an idea of what

such a practice can look like. The two illustrations do not embody every characteristic of engaged aesthetics. Christian educators will need to draw upon a variety of art works and art viewings, with different topics and styles, to provide a range of discoveries and experiences. Likewise, a variety of art offers an array of spiritual experiences. The two scripts below contain information for the teacher, a list of questions for the teacher to ask students, and an unpacking of the engaged aesthetic at work to connect the practice with the theory of the argument. The teacher can supply additional information and ask different questions, according to the interest and insights of the students.

### **Conclusion**

In this dissertation, I argued for an aesthetic approach to Christian education to provide the kind of transformative experiences that may bridge discrepancies between what people say they believe and what they actually do—a gap that has been identified by several studies of the Church of the Nazarene. After an introduction of the terms and concepts used, I examined the problem of the holiness gap in the Church of the Nazarene. Since Nazarenes ground their holiness theology in John Wesley’s theology, I then studied the congruence between Wesley’s espoused theology—his practice-laden beliefs—and his operant theology—his belief-laden practices. For the former, I looked at Wesley’s own recounting of his consistent theology in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* and at his representative sermon series on the Sermon on the Mount; for the latter, I presented examples of Wesley’s attitude towards money and his involvement in medical practices. In the close scrutiny of Wesley’s practical theology, an *engaged* aesthetics became

visible, which emphasizes qualities that indicate the involvement of the whole person in the shaping of meaning: embodiment, form-giving, foregrounding, paying attention and holding in tension. These elements of engaged aesthetics later become the framework for a transformative approach to Christian education through art viewing.

Next, I mined theories and neuroscientific evidence of aesthetic knowledge to clarify why and how aesthetic epistemology can be transformative. I also established that Wesley's holistic, transcendent experiential epistemology—which includes the affections and the spiritual senses—is commensurate with aesthetic epistemology. With Wesley's aesthetic practical theology as exemplar for Nazarenes, I then developed a theoretical approach to education, as one particular theological practice that builds on the transformative potential of aesthetic epistemology. Two example viewing scripts in Appendix A illustrate the engaged aesthetic pedagogy that facilitates and enhances transformation, as believers examine and bridge the possible gap between what they believe and how they act.

No true transformation is possible without the work of God in the life of a believer and a believing community. Because of the nature of my argument, I only touched on the role of the Holy Spirit in gaining insights. I focused on preparing a conduit through which the Spirit may work; a channel of education-with-art that provides the rich potential of new meaning-making. In their willingness to change, Christians work together with the Holy Spirit to find in the work of art an expression of something greater than the sum of its material components. This collaboration offers new, holistic possibilities of discovering and embracing holiness theology in beliefs and practices.

## APPENDIX A

### Example Script One: Flight into Egypt



#### Introduction for the Teacher<sup>1</sup>

*Flight into Egypt* is a painting by the contemporary Chinese artist He Qi [pronounce Huh Chee] (1951).<sup>2</sup> He Qi grew up in China during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). In order to escape hard labor on the fields, he started painting Mao portraits. One day he saw Rafael's painting of Madonna and Child in an old art magazine. He was immediately drawn to the peaceful smile of Jesus' mother, leading to his interest in Christianity. He Qi studied art at the Nanjing Art College and received his doctorate in

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<sup>1</sup> The information in this example was first published as a Bible Study on the artway.eu website, accessed August 27, 2011, <http://www.artway.eu/content.php?id=1034&lang=en&action=show>. Used with permission.

<sup>2</sup> He, Qi, *Flight into Egypt*, (2001); used with permission from the artist. Original source: heqigallery.com, accessed August 20, 2011.

Religious Art there (the first in China) in 1993, after having studied medieval art at the Hamburg Art Institute, Germany. Religious art from the middle ages often shows biblical scenes with European-looking people, in European settings. This inspired He Qi to depict biblical stories against a Chinese background, with Chinese characters. He Qi's work shows the influence of medieval European art, as well as his familiarity with Chinese folk art, such as woodcuts, paper cutting, traditional weaving and embroidery.

*Flight into Egypt* is a semi-abstract painting. People, animals and elements of the landscape can be recognized, but they are not realistically painted. This allows the artist to portray feelings and meaning by way of the cutting lines, the different elements within the painting and the bright, contrasting colors.

He Qi has used a number of black lines that cut through the painting. They often disrupt the form or the color of the figurative elements. This gives an unsettled feeling, as if we look into a broken mirror. Joseph had to disrupt the plans for his family because of the power-hungry actions of King Herod. Joseph must take his family and flee in the night (against a black sky with a sickle moon). Jesus, the Son of God, was not spared this human lot of being subject to political manipulation and violence. He can identify with the estimated 22.5 million refugees in the world today, who have also fled from situations that are life-threatening.<sup>3</sup>

One slanted line cuts the painting in two almost equal but asymmetrical parts. It runs from the top left of Joseph's face to the right bottom of Mary's skirt. In the middle,

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<sup>3</sup> According to the UN Refugee Agency on June 2017, the number of refugees worldwide is 22.5 million, but forcibly displaced people number 65.6 million. "Figures at a Glance," UNCHR, accessed January 26, 2018, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

the line divides Jesus' face in two. Could this refer to the dual nature of Jesus: both man and God? Or maybe it points towards the joy *and* the suffering, the highest glory *and* the deepest rejection that Jesus would experience in his life?

In the painting, the pyramids are represented in a number of intersecting triangles. The one in the middle and to the right seem to stand solidly on the ground, positioned to stay there for many more centuries. The pyramid on the left, however, is sliding down, as if the coming of the Son of God is undermining the unshakable power of Egypt.

Mary and Jesus' faces are soft and round, but Joseph's face is made up of four straight lines. His face speaks of determination, it is "set like flint" – see Isaiah 50:7, a passage that predicts Jesus' suffering. Joseph must have been an extraordinary man, chosen for the task of rearing the Son of God, just as Mary was chosen to be the mother. Joseph cared for his family under threat from King Herod, and he was obedient to God without hesitation when God told him in a dream to flee to Egypt.

Joseph's one arm and hand are stretched out ahead, as if to point the way, while his other hand holds a peasant's knapsack with a few belongings. The arm, Joseph's head, his (invisible) body and the stick form a cross, already looming over Jesus. Joseph's square determination is in contrast to and in balance with his inner flexibility and obedience to God's guidance through his dreams. Mary, with all her curves, looks very soft and gentle, holding her precious Child. And yet, she has an inner strength and courage as she "treasured all these things in her heart" (Luke 2: 19, 51). She wears a simple necklace with a small cross, a symbol of the sorrow that was to come, the sword that was to pierce her heart (Luke 2: 35).

Jesus is portrayed in the tradition of Chinese painting: a round-faced child, bald except for a tuft of hair on his forehead. Compared to him, it looks as if Joseph and Mary are wearing masks, as if to indicate the difference between them (and us), sinful human beings, and the Son of God, perfectly human as humans were created to be.

The donkey would have been a mere beast of burden, if it wasn't for his human eyes. He Qi often paints big eyes—copying the style of paper cutting in which eyes have to be large in order to connect paper line to paper line; nothing can “float” in a paper cutting. The fierce expression of the donkey, enhanced by the red nostrils that seem to breathe fire, reminds us of Balaam's donkey (Num. 22: 22-35). Does this donkey also see spiritual realities that human eyes cannot see? Does the donkey see the Holy Spirit in the form of the dove? Interestingly, in traditional European art, the dove of the Holy Spirit is placed in the top half of paintings, descending (as in Mark 1:10). Here the dove is ascending, pointing straight at the tight-knit group of three. The motion of the dove is directly at the holy family, as if the Holy Spirit is encircling them with God's presence and God's peace.

The portrait of this family is one of poverty: they travel walking and riding a donkey, instead of riding on a horseback or in a chariot. He Qi has painted them in traditional Chinese rural costumes: Joseph and Mary's headdress, the fabric of the knapsack and of Mary's dress, the slipper visible of Jesus' foot, embroidered with a cat (or lion)'s head. The family brings only a few things with them to eke out an existence in exile.

Jesus is seated on Mary's lap. We can only see one foot (with the embroidered

slipper) pointing down, as if he has his other leg curled underneath him. Chinese viewers



of this painting will certainly be reminded of the traditional Buddhist goddess of mercy, Guanyin, who is traditionally depicted in a similar pose.<sup>4</sup> Guanyin is revered as bodhisattva, one who has reached nirvana but who decided to come back to show people the way of salvation. That is why she is portrayed as if “stepping down” from her seated position. This posture is furthermore known as her pose of

royal play, to represent the ceaseless play of creation. For Chinese viewers, He Qi draws an interesting parallel between Guanyin and Jesus.

### Viewing Script #1

The teacher can intersperse the questions with information from the introduction at appropriate times.

#### *A First Look*

1. [Has anyone seen this image before?]<sup>5</sup>
2. What features of this painting strike you first?
3. What are the elements of this painting? People, animals, objects, landscape?
4. Where do the lines run in this painting? What geometric shapes do you see?

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<sup>4</sup> Bodhisattva Guanyin (11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century AD, in Nelson-Atkins Museum Collection, Kansas City, MO. Photo by Rebecca Arnett from Castleton, Vermont, USA - Bodhisattva Guanyin, CC BY-SA 2.0, accessed January 19, 2018, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2027590>.

<sup>5</sup> If students have seen this painting before, they may know more about the painting and the artist. The teacher can ask the students not to divulge any specifics until it is time for that information.

5. What is the mood of the painting? What time of day is this?
6. How does the specific design add or distract from the mood?
7. (If not mentioned already) What ethnicity are the figures?

### *Looking Deeper*

1. What other art form do the black lines resemble? [e.g. stained glass]
2. What kind of emotion is evoked the pattern of the lines?
3. Are there any elements that have symbolic meaning?
4. What metaphors are expressed in this painting?
5. How many pyramids do you see? Is there anything that strikes you about them?
6. What are the faces telling you?
7. Which emotion does each face express?
8. What are the hands saying?
9. What are the donkey and the dove saying?
10. What kind of movement are portrayed in the painting?

### *Making Connections*

1. (If not mentioned earlier) What story is depicted here? [Matthew 2: 13-23]
2. What elements make this painting recognizable as the flight of Mary, Joseph and Jesus to Egypt?
3. How does the artist portray the desert?
4. What is the association of pyramids with the Old Testament?

5. What are the positive stories about Egypt in the Old Testament?
6. What are the negative stories about Egypt in the Old Testament?
7. Who else fled to Egypt?
8. How are the elements of the biblical story portrayed with the design elements (line, shape, color, composition, (lack of) balance, contrast)?
9. What associations to biblical stories do the various objects in the painting have?
10. Do these associations have something to say about the theme of the painting?

### *Looking Again*

1. The artists painted Mary, Joseph and Jesus very close together. In this painting, what is your impressions of them as a family and as individual persons?
2. What is the role of the donkey, and of the dove?
3. What in the painting tells you that they are refugees?
4. How does this story parallel or differ from today's refugees?

### *Integrating*

1. Which part of the painting speaks to you the most?
2. Do you think that the artist has done justice to the biblical text?
3. What is different from the text?
4. What has the artist added that clarifies or obscures the text?
5. What would you do differently if you could paint this text?
6. What does this painting say about refugees?

7. Does it have anything to say about contemporary refugees and the responsibility of the Church?

### **Unpacking the Engaged Aesthetic**

In order to connect the argument of the dissertation to the practice of art viewing, I will unpack the engaged aesthetic that is at work in the scripts. These remarks are only meant as examples; the reality will be different with every group, context, and viewing.

*Embodiment:* A number of the questions focus on the bodily presence of the figures in the painting, their relation, their posture, their movements, and the emotions they express. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus are portrayed with abstractions, unusual colors, and exotic clothing. The lines make it hard to see them as a whole. Because of the extra work required to recognize all these elements as a whole, the viewer becomes more aware of the physical presence of the figures. Viewers will internally compare the three figures to what people look like in real life, and to the holy family in other paintings. Some of the symbolism and metaphors of the painting are related to bodies, such as Joseph's uprightness and determination, pointing the way with his hand, standing by his wife; Mary's curves that make room for her son, as she holds him safely and yet lightly; Jesus looking straight at the viewer, held by Mary and yet strangely self-sufficient, holding an apple, a reference to the forbidden fruit from Genesis 3? Or is Mary holding a heart? She holds her hand straight ahead of Jesus with as much determination as Joseph's pointing, and already the arm(s) outstretched in anticipation of the crucifixion. Making these aspects conscious, allows more time to make meaning out of what is seen and to

connect to it.

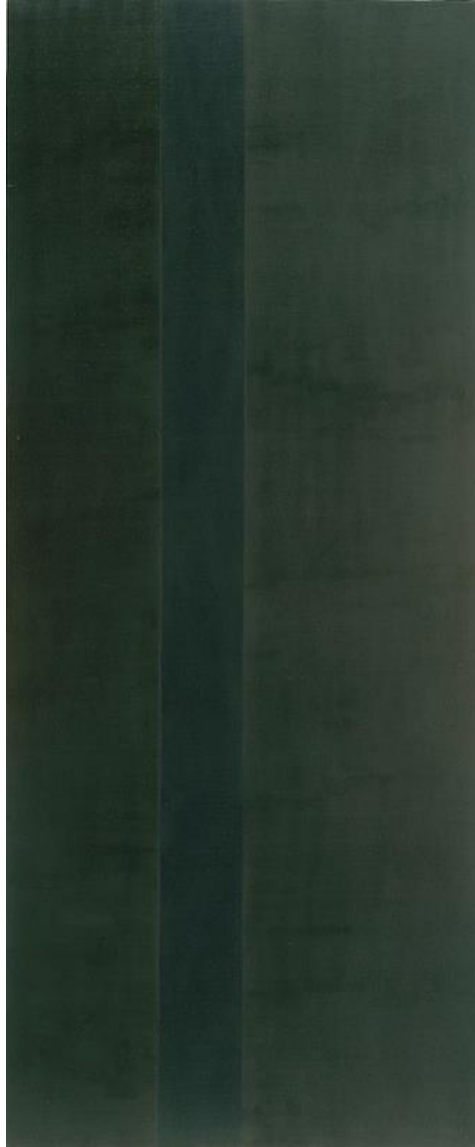
*Form giving.* The questions give the opportunity to reflect how Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were obedient to God, and on the cost of obedience. The connection to today's refugees, among whom are Christians who had to flee for their lives, is inevitable. Viewers can imagine themselves in a similar situation and contemplate what that would mean.

*Foregrounding.* The subject of the painting unfortunately reflects today's situation for millions of people. Reflecting on the escape of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus invites contemplation on the plight of contemporary refugees and displaced people. This could lead to more understanding, and perhaps a willingness to become involved.

*Paying attention.* The painting reveals layers of meaning as viewers observe more details. The connections people make between the painting and their own body, their own experience of obedience, of feeling unsafe, leading to a little insight in what it means to be a refugee, are all the reward of attending closely to visual details, to metaphors, and to emotions.

*Holding in tension.* This painting discloses a fair amount of tension, for instance by the jarring black lines and the bright, clashing colors. The subject matter exposes the anxiety of fleeing for one's life and the insecurity of the future. The Christmas opposites continue: Christ the King on the run, on a donkey, with no earthly possessions. When the subject is drawn into the present, the tension of our Christian responsibility and our inability to solve the refugee problem becomes painfully evident. Whether these tensions can be held or resolved, depends on many factors. To the extent that the painting provides

a creative, fruitful tension, it will be worth revisiting in the future as it asks, “What are you doing with this new insight?”

**Example Script Two: An Abstract Painting**

Barnett Newman, *Abraham*, 1949<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Permission to use under license ART166430. Newman, Barnett (1905-1970) © ARS, NY. Oil on canvas, 6'10 3/4" x 34 1/2". Philip Johnson Fund, The Museum of Modern Art. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY. © 2018 The Barnett Newman Foundation, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

## Viewing Script #2

### *First Look*

1. [Has anyone seen this image before?]
2. What do you see?
3. What is your first impression of this painting?
4. What is going on in this painting?
5. Which emotion does it express for you?
6. What does it mean to you that the black stripe does not divide the plane evenly?

### *Information 1*

The size of this painting is over 7 feet by 34.5". It hangs in the New York Museum of Modern Art, in a corner of a gallery. It starts at about knee height and when standing about two feet away of it, you need to kink your neck to see the top. This gives the impression that the black field and the black stripe keep on going up and up. The painting is black on black, with a tiny bit of white setting the stripe off from the rest.

### *Second Look*

1. What do you think your reaction would be in front of this blackness?
2. Why do you think the painter used only black?
3. What is the effect of the white paint?
4. Is God present in this painting?

*Information 2*

This painting was painted by a Jew in 1949.

*Third Look*

1. What could be the connection between Jewishness, 1949, and the color black?
2. Does the stripe signify anything different now?
3. Does the information change the emotion of the painting?
4. Where is God now?

*Information 3*

The painter eventually called this painting *Abraham*.

*Fourth Look*

1. Are there associations of the name Abraham to the color black or the shapes in the painting?
2. Does the information change the emotion of the painting?
3. What is God's role in the painting?

*Information 4*

Abraham is also the name of the artist's father, who died in 1947.

*Fifth Look*

1. Do you see anything differently?
2. Does the color black have a changed emotional value now?
3. Is God still present?

*Information 5*

The name of the painter is Barnett Newman, an important figure in abstract expressionism and color field painting. The characteristic element in his paintings are the stripes, which he called “zips.” A Jewish blogger wrote the following: “The Hebrew term *makom*, meaning “place” and also one of God’s names — referencing, in the abstract, God’s transcendence over particular places and His “occupation” of all spaces — was particularly important to Newman. ... He hoped such a place would be created between his art and the viewer.”<sup>7</sup>

*Sixth Look*

1. How is the concept of place expressed in this painting?
2. How is God’s occupation of space represented here?
3. Which emotions find space here?
4. Does this painting create a place for you?

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<sup>7</sup> Menachem Wecker, “His Cross to Bear,” (August 1, 2012), forward.com, accessed January 26, 2018, <https://forward.com/culture/159912/his-cross-to-bear/>.

### Unpacking the Engaged Aesthetic

The goal of this script is to give the viewers an experience of how meaning changes with information. It can encourage viewers to value biographical and art historical information, since it can alter their experience with the painting.

*Embodiment.* The painting's size needs to be understood physically, and the bodily effect of the color black is visceral. The metaphors connected with blackness and darkness are plentiful, both negative and positive. As possibilities of meaning evolve with each piece of information, the bodies of others become part of the viewing experience: Jews in the concentration camps—and by extension perhaps African-Americans in slavery or prison—fathers, deceased people, people mourning their loved ones. Any of these may trigger a personal memory, experience, or emotion.

*Form giving.* One of the desired outcomes of this viewing script is that people will realize the difference between their experience and judgment at first glance, and after salient information. If that is true about a painting, how much more about people. Understanding this could alter the shape of someone's interactions with strangers into a more open and hospitable exchange.

*Paying attention.* In this script new information about the painting and the artist forces a reassessment of the elements of the painting. The old ways of seeing are replaced or augmented by new ways of understanding.

*Holding in tension.* The painting exhibits the tension between the abstractness of the pictorial elements and the intense emotional associations that can be made; between the simplicity of the design and the complexity that can be expressed by the art work.

Furthermore, the constant shifting of meaning with new information can be unsettling to those who want to know what the *right* interpretation of the painting is. Barnett Newman declared that the painting was not about his father.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, we as viewers are free to make any connections we want to make.<sup>9</sup> That is also a tension; to hold the possibility that the intention of the artist is not the same as the meaning of the painting for the viewer. Finally, the contrast between the slim white trim and the black zip—the tension between light and dark—is used by the artist to give the illusion of light shining behind the black stripe. Here, the juxtaposition is used to give hope of something alive and glorious behind the darkness of suffering.

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<sup>8</sup> See Yve-Alain Bois, “On Two Paintings by Barnett Newman,” *October* 108 (Spring 2004): 15.

<sup>9</sup> If the purpose of the interpretation was to write an art review for a magazine or a paper for an art class, certain rules apply to discern the “right” interpretation. See, for instance, Terry Barrett, *Interpreting Art: Reflecting, Wondering, and Responding* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2002); and Henry M. Sayre, *Writing About Art*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009).

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**CURRICULUM VITAE**

