

“BE YE HOLY AS I AM HOLY”:  
THE IMPLICATIONS OF WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS  
FOR ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION LANGUAGE.<sup>1</sup>

Hank Spaulding,  
Trevecca Nazarene University graduate, MDiv student Duke Divinity School

What does it mean to be holy? It is hard to digest the weight of glory that such a call represents. If we try to abide in our strength, we surely will not meet the demands of holiness. That being said, the call is not impossible.

The language of Entire Sanctification is located in quite a precarious position. The current state of the Wesleyan-Holiness movement allows a wonderful opportunity to adopt a new language that allows for room and vitality. The past few decades have produced a plethora of Holiness material to deepen our understanding of holiness in ways never thought before. However, a common misconception is present in the language of Entire Sanctification. It is the misconception of Entire Sanctification as reducible to a moral imperative. This being said there has arisen some good scholarship that suggests it is not a question of morality.<sup>2</sup> When reduced to a moral imperative, the language of Entire Sanctification runs the risk of being lost or impossible. The understanding of Entire Sanctification can be expressed as the Old Testament commandment in Leviticus 11:44 when the Lord says to Moses, “...be holy, for I am holy.”<sup>3</sup> This view, coupled with the Deuteronomic imperative, “Choose life so that you and your descendants may live...”<sup>4</sup> would suggest that it is a question of the will/morality. However, I believe that to be a mis-reading of this passage. Correctly read, these passages, coupled with our task in the Wesleyan Holiness tradition, reveal that the call to be holy needs context in order to be intelligible. The question before us, then, is ‘what context?’

The problem can be visualized philosophically. Often our Wesleyan Holiness context begins with the question, “what is the good?” Once that answer is settled, the goal of holiness becomes merely achieving the defined good. The situation this question finds its origin in is the Greek philosophical system. It is in this system that we find the good, but we do not find the good alone. The good is found with the notion of the beautiful.<sup>5</sup> These two cannot be found independently. The whole of the history of philosophy knows this to be true. The good is the ultimate reality for which Plato and Aristotle<sup>6</sup> long, but the beautiful is where the good finds concrete expression. Goodness is expressed as the beautiful. Yet, it is the beautiful that

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<sup>2</sup> Spaulding, Henry. A Postmodern Re-Thinking of Ethical Reflection in the Wesleyan/Holiness Tradition. *Wesleyan Theological Journal*. Vol 35, Numer 1. Spring, 2000, 41

<sup>3</sup> Leviticus 11:44

<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 30: 19b

<sup>5</sup> The transcendental of the true is also an important aspect. The three are meant for each other in a perfect manner, but for the sake of this essay I will be restricting my task to just the good and the beautiful. It will suffice to say that when speaking of one of the Transcendentals without referencing the others is impossible.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle

ultimately attracts the good. The beautiful presents a transcendent logic, which is its appeal. Ethics, then, (meaning understanding how to do the good) lies in an understanding of proper aesthetics (i.e. beautiful living). Beauty allows life to transcend duty as a primary category. Beauty provides the context for which the ethical person knows that they living rightly. The question here is not merely to discard the moral category in appropriating Entire Sanctification as a aesthetic act. Rather, it is my task to represent Entire Sanctification as an act, which transcends mere act, and allows the subject to envision themselves as a part of the divine life of the Trinity. Again, we do not discard the ethical dimension, but rather opt to give fuller expression to the ethical dimension by locating Entire Sanctification as an aesthetic practice.

Likewise, with Christianity, the beauty of God provides context. Also, with Christianity, the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition benefits from an aesthetic to provide a context in which we can see the life of Entire Sanctification. The context of beauty is not the philosophical concept of beauty, but the beauty of God. Karl Barth says it best when he writes, "...it is as He is God that He is also beautiful, so that He is the basis and standard of everything that is beautiful and of all ideas of the beautiful..."<sup>7</sup>

Thus it is that God provides his own context for the command "Be Ye Holy as I am Holy."<sup>8</sup> So I argue that to begin to discuss Entire Sanctification for our Wesleyan-Holiness tradition is to develop a Wesleyan Theological Aesthetic. When this happens we might properly interpret the verse from Leviticus "Be ye beautiful as I am beautiful." A Wesleyan Theological Aesthetic lays bare the limits of morality alone for expressing holiness and Christian Perfection. Therefore, holiness when understood in this way refuses to reduce Entire Sanctification to an act of the will. This is a notion that is developed in our Wesleyan tradition because it was John Wesley who understood holiness and sanctification in light of the fullness of grace when he writes, "If any doubt of this privilege (Christian Holiness) of the sons of God, the question is not to be decided by abstract reasonings, which may be drawn out into an endless length, and leave the point just as it was before...By his Word will we abide, and that alone. Hereby we ought to be judged."<sup>9</sup> Entire Sanctification is the opening up of the fullness of the possibility of action in light of the revelation of Christ. Swiss theologian Hans Urs Von Balthasar writes,

This seeing, which by God's grace brings no blinding of the human spirit through an immoderate light, but gives the capacity to stand firm in the presence of the infinite simplicity, has as its first effect on man a sinking down in adoration before the glory; but at the same time, it is the strongest impulse for the subsequent thinking that converts what is seen into action, for the unity of the form offers a fullness of approaches, doors and possibilities for entry.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics, Vol. 2, The Doctrine of God.* in *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader.* Ed. Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 318.

<sup>8</sup> Leviticus 11:44 KJV

<sup>9</sup> Wesley, John. *Christian Perfection. John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology.* Ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater. (Nashville: Abingdon), 74.

<sup>10</sup> Von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics Vol. VII Theology: The New Covenant.* Ed. John Riches. Trans. Brian McNeil. (San Francisco: Ignatius), 15.

The two quotes seem to suggest that we abide in the simplicity of the Word of God and the breaking in of the revelation of God, which is understood aesthetically, in order to live holy lives. The statement from Balthasar “...coverts what is seen into action...”<sup>11</sup> represents the main aspect of an aesthetic read of Entire Sanctification. For the revelation of beauty in the Glory of the Lord, the action is not merely an act of the will. Rather, as Balthasar suggests, the will is transformed in the encounter with the beautiful opening up the fullness of Entire Sanctification. It is a truth that Wesley saw at the heart of the word of God and Balthasar saw aesthetically. An aesthetic provides a place for a future development of Entire Sanctification language.

My task will consist of showing the importance of an aesthetic in the history of philosophy (primarily through the thought of the philosophy Plotinus, Augustine, Hegel, and Kant) and its function of showing the individual how to live the good. This is not a comprehensive study of the history of aesthetic theory in Philosophy, and there have been many other works that were not explored in depth in this work.<sup>12</sup> Next I will show how a Theological aesthetic is distinct from a philosophical aesthetic. Lastly, I will propose a Wesleyan Theological Aesthetic that names the holy life and opens up the possibility for understanding what we call ‘Entire Sanctification’ in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition.

### *History of the Role of Aesthetics*

#### *Plotinus*

I start with Plotinus because of his particular emphasis on the beautiful. Plotinus makes a separate distinction, which was not uncommon for his era, between what we perceive as the beautiful in material reality (pretty) and what is formal (truly beautiful). This can be best summarized by Ludwig Wittgenstein, “What is pretty cannot be beautiful.”<sup>13</sup> The distinction between material and formal shows a vestige of Platonic dialectic in which there exists a perfect form and an imperfect representation. This is the distinction that I draw from Plotinus.

There is no need here to provide an exhaustive account of Plotinus’ work. Other works have achieved just such an account. Rather, my desire is to show how a certain thread of logic of the beautiful fulfills and enhances an understanding of the good. Plotinus achieves, in his work, my first claim about the beautiful, namely union with and importance to the good.

For Plotinus, the good is found in the ultimate foundational reality he calls the One. The One emanates out of his own fullness into material reality, thus giving it depth. Plotinus maintains that beauty constitutes this reality that pours into the material. More importantly, as commentator Emile Brehier writes, “The aesthetics of Plotinus is impregnated with the idea that

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> The main works in which I am referring are Plato’s *Ion*, *Republic*, and Aristotle’s *Poetics*.

<sup>13</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Culture and Value*. Ed. G.H. Von Wright, Trans. Peter Winch. (Chicago: Univ of Chicago, 1984), 43e.

beauty is not added to things as an external accident but constitutes their very essence.”<sup>14</sup> In Plotinus, beauty illuminates that which is supremely good. It opens up the potential of the fullness of the divine (in one’s self) as the beautiful illuminates the “good.” It seems hard to imagine such an instance when the beauty of the good breaks in upon us. However, this “breaking in” pushes us to see exactly what Plotinus means by emanation. Emanation, in the work of Plotinus, is the process whereby we are shown the good way, which is beautiful living. Plotinus argues that “...Beauty *is* the Authentic-Existents...”<sup>15</sup> This meaning to live at all requires our ability to live beautifully.

The task of living beautifully for the human being is difficult, for the journey back to the “One” must be accomplished by the soul. It might be good to point out that this journey of the soul retains the Platonic dualism of soul and body. Plotinus writes:

If a man has been immersed in filth or daubed with mud, his native comeliness disappears and all that is seen in the foul stuff besmearing him: his ugly condition is due to alien matter that has encrusted him, and if he is to win back his grace it must be his business to scour and purify himself and make himself what he was. So, we may justly say a Soul becomes ugly – by something foisted upon it, by sinking itself into the alien, by a fall, a descent into body, into Matter. The dishonor of the Soul is in its ceasing to be clean and apart.<sup>16</sup>

Plotinus shows here a classical Platonic distinction of the soul’s journey from the material to the perfect reality, but for our study on aesthetics, let us see what we might be able to draw from this. One can notice from the above quote that the necessity to be freed from the body isn’t the form of a moral imperative. Rather, Plotinus frames the need for the soul to leave behind the body in such a way as to imply transformation. This transformation involves Plotinus’ understanding of desire. Meaning, for Plotinus the un-comeliness of the soul is not an issue of bad performance, but a failure of love. In the illumination of the beautiful overcomes this failure. This is achieved when the soul sees the illumination of the beautiful, and then becomes keenly aware of its “un-comeliness” in relation to the beautiful. It must then cast aside its “ugliness” and strive towards the path of light. This movement towards the light is not reducible to morality, but rather celebrates the possibility of fullness that the beautiful represents. Plotinus says, “It is sound, I think, to find the primal source of *Love* in a tendency of the Soul towards pure beauty...(Plotinus, 175, italics added),”<sup>17</sup> this is the language of fullness that we see in Plotinus as the possibility of the fullness of response, which is seen in love, towards the beautiful. This cannot be divorced from the good, but to be seen with it.

The strength of Plotinus’ argument is not that it is embedded in Greek metaphysics, but that it suggests human transcendence. For once philosophy makes the move into modernity, it loses the language of the soul. I am not arguing that the notion of the soul should resume center

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<sup>14</sup> Brehier, Emile. *The Philosophy of Plotinus*. Trans. Joseph Thomas. (Chicago: Univ of Chicago Press, 1958), 87

<sup>15</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads*. Trans. Stephen MacKenna. Ed. John Dillon. (New York: Penguin Press, 1991), 52

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 51

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 175, italics added

stage in ideology. Rather, the language of the soul represents a possibility for us to see and understand beauty in a new way.

The significance of Plotinus in aesthetics is not merely *that* he speaks of beauty in the mystic way that he does; rather Plotinus' power is precisely in his *relation* of the Good (i.e. the One) *with* beauty. Humanity comes under the realm of the good by way of the emanating of the One (which is at once the true, the good, and the beautiful) to man. So it is, that the man's response is none other than to the fullness of the Good, which is beauty. Beauty is the opening up of one's soul, for Plotinus, to the Good. Again, this is the importance: that response to the good is beautiful living, which is not reductionistic but rather celebrates fullness of living. This is the beauty of living, because these three – the Good, the True, and the Beautiful -- are meant to be one perfect unity.

### *Kant*

Immanuel Kant casts light on the difficulty of the relationship between aesthetics and moral consequence. One particular challenge that Kant shows is the embeddedness of 'duty' into his ethics. The problem lies in Kant's need to contend a moral imperative for the genuine human existence. He argues that all experience can be understood through his categorical imperative thus making reason a universal phenomenon, but to say that Kant has no use for the beautiful would be a misunderstanding. In fact, the third volume of his *Critique* is devoted entirely to aesthetic discourse. Yet, Kant stands with Plato and Aristotle as a cornerstone of aesthetic theory, even moving beyond them by writing the first integrated aesthetic theory with a philosophical system, *The Critique of Judgment*. I believe that the key contribution of Kant lies in his understanding of the role of the beautiful. For it is Kant that specifies, as does Plotinus, beauty (or any of the other Transcendentals) as a something that cannot be fully comprehended. This is fundamental for Kant who argues that beauty (along with other realities) lies beyond the veil of the Sublime. The Sublime is not to be equated with the beautiful, which is a common mistake in Kantian philosophical interpretation. Rather, the Sublime is a limitation imposed by Kant on reason.

The importance of this piece of Kantian understanding is twofold: 1) Kant has a unique understanding of how the beautiful interacts with humanity, and 2) Kant makes an effort to show how the beautiful has the capability to have meaning for all human beings in the realm of experience.

First is the notion of the Sublime that exists in Kant. The Sublime, which has already been noted, is the limiting mechanism on reason or what man can know. This is because Kant wants to make room for things like experience and faith in his critique. However, Kant sees the importance of reason as chief among the human faculties. Thus, Kant is very much concerned with harmony between faculties of judgment. This being said, the sublime represents the veil behind which nothing can be known and can only be experienced. The infinite produces a feeling of displeasure that, as Kant points out, arises out of the fact that we cannot know the infinite because there is not adequate human intuition that can comprehend fully the infinite. As

Kant writes, “The sublime is the name given to what is *absolutely great*.”<sup>18</sup> The sublime functions as an intuition of our mind that makes us aware of our own limitedness and thus pushes us to a deeper understanding of reality. As Kant writes about the sublime, it is “a faculty of the mind that surpasses every standard of sense.”<sup>19</sup> This is summarized best by Donald W. Crawford when he writes, that the sublime is

... a faculty which exercises dominion over our own sensible powers (that is, nature in us), always directing us toward a more adequate sensible representation of our ideas, as we strive for a greater and greater totality of systematic knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

The sublime poses within its truth the fundamental ability to order reality. For example, we can never experience/know the beautiful in its fullness, but in its contemplation leads to a more complete understanding and opens up a greater totality of knowledge. This leads us into how it affects humans more particularly.

Kant is arguing for a universality of recognition of the beautiful in objects. An example of this recognition would be the recognition of a flower or building as beautiful. To universalize the beautiful is not the Kantian position. Rather, as stated by Kant, “The beautiful is that which, apart from concepts, is represented as the object of a universal delight.”<sup>21</sup> Beauty is a judgment rather than the innate universal claim of an object. This makes room for the particularity of regular appearances of beauty and validity for personal experience for the self. Thus, Kant here makes room for the self to perceive the beautiful not as a universal principle but according to a practice and habit of the transcendental unity of reason and experience.

This leads into Kant’s understanding of disinterestedness. We have already come to see that the sublime leads us into a deeper totality of reasoning, but how does it do this particularly?<sup>22</sup> Kant, here, brings forward his understanding then of disinterestedness. This is summarized best by in his statement, “*Taste* is the faculty of judging an object or a mode of representation by means of a delight or aversion *apart from any interest*. The object of such a delight is called *beautiful*.”<sup>23</sup> Only he one who is truly disinterested can appreciate the beautiful.

This is an issue that is best illumined in light of the disagreement that has arisen between Kant and the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche, who is a major critic of Kant, believes that it is impossible to classify something as beautiful apart from any interest. The argument is

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<sup>18</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* Trans. James Creed Meredith. Ed. Nicholas Walker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 78.

<sup>19</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*. Trans. J.H. Bernard, (New York: Hafner, 1951) as quoted by Donald Crawford, “Kant,” *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Ed. Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 63

<sup>20</sup> Crawford, Donald, “Kant,” *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Ed. Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 63

<sup>21</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 42.

<sup>22</sup> Of course noting that understanding the sublime in Kant is very difficult to nail down in the work of Kant.

<sup>23</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 42.

best summarized by the twentieth century philosopher Martin Heidegger when he shows a misunderstanding that Nietzsche has in regards to this notion of Kant's. Heidegger writes,

But then what does Kant mean by the definition of the beautiful as the object of "disinterested" delight? What does "devoid of all interest" mean? "Interest" comes from the Latin *mihi interest*, something is of importance to me. To take an interest in something suggests wanting to have it for oneself as a possession, to have disposition and control over it. When we take an interest in something we put it in the context of what we intend to do with it and what we want of it...[however] Whatever exacts of us the judgment "This is beautiful" can never be an interest. That is to say, in order to find something beautiful, we must let what encounters us, purely as it is in itself, come before us in its own standard and worth. We may not take it into account in advance with a view to something else, our goals and intentions, our possible enjoyment and advantage. Comportment toward the beautiful as such, says Kant, is *unconstrained favoring*. We must freely grant to what encounters us as such its way to be; we must allow and bestow upon it what belongs to it and what it brings to us.<sup>24</sup>

Heidegger here shows a hidden truth in the thought of Kant, namely that the beautiful is appreciated as disinterest. What Heidegger shows by noting disinterest is that Kant sees the beautiful as something that should come to us freely and without restraint. This is very true of what should be deemed as beautiful. What we might say then to continue this line of thought is that beauty serves as an interruption. It trespasses on our reality with its own and does so in such a way that enhances our understanding of life.

Though Kant never expressly connects the relation between beauty and morality, he does offer a statement that illuminates how these things are meant to be held together in the unity of love when he writes, "The beautiful prepares us to esteem something highly even in opposition to our own [reality]."<sup>25</sup> The point is that when interrupted by the beautiful it surprises us to a point where we are moved to act differently, that is apart from any self-interest. The sublime moves us to this action, and the beautiful drives us to it. The frustration lies with being unable to fully comprehend the beautiful in its fullness. However, it is precisely the experience of frustration that moves us to act. This experience is judged to be universal because it is a judgment deemed necessary by the limits of knowledge and is the result of the a priori category of intuition that all rational beings share, or rather the harmonious correspondence between experience and intellect.

So it is that Kant shows us two fundamental assertions that advance the implications an aesthetic can have on entire sanctification. First, beauty represents an ordering reality that cannot be known in its fullness but can only be postulated with the unity of experience and reason. Secondly, Kant shows how knowing the beautiful takes a disinterested mind, one that can be moved from an internal motivation to a broader understanding of reality. This is the importance

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<sup>24</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Kant's Doctrine of the Beautiful: Its Misinterpretation by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche," in *Nietzsche: A Critical Reader*, Ed. Peter R. Sedgwick. (Malden: Blackwell, 1995), 105-6

<sup>25</sup> Kant quoted in Crawford, 67

of reflection, both aesthetic and moral: the depth of the interruption of beauty allows us to find truth and goodness wrapped up in beauty.

### *Hegel*

It is important to point out, as was said at the outset of this section, and now at the outset of the last philosopher that we will be exploring, that we are not doing a comprehensive analysis of aesthetic theory in the history of philosophy. The three philosophers explored here possess a thread that is built upon in each that draws out my understanding of the implications of aesthetic theory in the language of entire sanctification. This part of the essay is meant to draw out what we mean by aesthetic in relation to an understanding of the good and true. I am suggesting this approach because we must understand what we mean by *aesthetic* before we can show how peculiar a *theological aesthetic* is. We must also see how morality (i.e. explanation of how to perform the good) can only ever truly be enacted on the basis of given the context of the beautiful. To that end we turn to our study of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

Our purpose in my including of Hegel into the conversation of the history of aesthetic theory is short, but adds the logical end that I would like to make. This end is wrapped up in his basic philosophical dialectic. He believes that art develops over time and has an ultimate expression arising from its historical roots. Like all of Hegel's philosophy, his aesthetic is divided into three distinct parts (thesis, antithesis, and synthesis) reaching the third synthesis in absolute spirit. These three distinctions are: symbolic, classical, and romantic. Hegel sums up what these distinctions are and why he makes them in this statement at the end of his *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*,

The higher principle we have found in the types of art – symbolic, classical, and romantic – which are the universal stages or elements of the Idea of beauty itself. For *symbolic* art attains its most adequate reality and most complete application in *architecture*, in which it holds sway in the full import of its notion, and is not yet degraded to be, as it were, the inorganic nature dealt with by other art. The *classical* type of art, on the other hand, finds adequate realization in sculpture, while it treats architecture only as furnishing an enclosure in which it is to operate, and has not acquired the power of development painting and music as absolute forms for its content. The *romantic* type of art, finally, takes possession of painting and music, and in like manner of poetic representation, as substantive and unconditionally adequate modes of utterance. Poetry, however, is conformable to all types of the beautiful, and extends over them all, because the artistic imagination is its proper medium, and imagination is essential to every product that belongs to the beautiful, whatever its type may be.<sup>26</sup>

This quote represents the basic presupposition of Hegel on aesthetics, namely that the mediums progress and attain their consummate form: poetry. In addition to this quote, there are two more points that need to be noted about Hegel. The first is that Hegel is of the understanding that art never progressed past the era of the Greeks. This seems at odds with his basic philosophical

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<sup>26</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* Trans. Michael Inwood. (New York: Penguin Group, 1993), 96-7

system, which would tend to argue that as history progresses so does our understanding. This shows the reader that Hegel's aesthetic is not integrated in his philosophical system as much as Kant's philosophical system. This is a rather pessimistic analysis because it seems to suggest an end to artistic reflection altogether. The second point is just that, Hegel announces the end of art in his lectures on aesthetics. Hegel writes,

...the form of art has ceased to be the supreme need of the spirit. No matter how excellent we find the statues of the Greek gods, no matter how we see God the Father, Christ and Mary so estimably and perfectly portrayed: it is no help; we bow the knee no longer.<sup>27</sup>

This is especially troubling because Hegel himself lived in the age of people such as Goethe, Mozart, Haydn, Schubert, and Beethoven. These men resound as some of the greatest artists of all history. No one, arguably, has reached the genius of Mozart before or since. Because of this 'end of art' philosophy, Hegel has been condemned by much of the artistic community.

It is not this notion, namely the end of art, which composes the reasoning for our exploration of Hegel's aesthetic theory. Hegel, in his aesthetic, is mostly concerned with how art develops the mind. And it is this line that is most intriguing for our exploration of the role of aesthetic when he talks about poetry as a medium, "Poetry, however, is conformable to all types of the beautiful, and extends over them all, because the artistic imagination is its proper medium, and imagination is essential to every product that belongs to the beautiful, whatever its type may be."<sup>28</sup> Poetry as a form of art draws the one who crafts its meter into the poem not just as silent observer but as imaginative creator. Hegel favors poetry in this regard because it has expression that other forms of art do not draw in the observer to participate (i.e. architecture, sculpting, etc). Even the origin of the word poetry connotes meaning. The Greek word that we get poetry from is *poesis*, which means to do or make. This represents what I believe to be the ultimate role of aesthetics: that we not passively observe art, but rather seek ways to make beauty in other ways. It is an imaginative process that requires a passion for what we have seen so that we may seek to make beauty everywhere we go.

So in essence this is the train of thought that we should gather from this brief history of aesthetic theory. First, beauty/aesthetic theory is to remind us that there is a deeper reality beyond all humanity.<sup>29</sup> This reality calls us to a broader way of thinking and doing. It begins to open up a way of fullness that we can set our focus on. Secondly, this reality of fullness shows its ordering rationale for our lives. We cannot know it in its fullness but come to see it through

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<sup>27</sup> G.W.F Hegel. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. A.V. Miller, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) as quoted by Inwood, Michael, "Hegel," *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Ed. Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes. (New York: Routledge, 2002),76

<sup>28</sup> Hegel, *Lectures*, 97

<sup>29</sup> This is a concept that falls into all categories of human discourse. One would have to admit, even if they are not particularly religious, that love represents a reality that is beyond all comprehension and is a foundation for all genuine existence. The roles of systemic power would be another example of such a reality. Our culture, especially today, would be oblivious if they said there is no deep reality beyond mere scientific, measurable human reality.

the correspondence of our experience and experiential connections with reason. Thirdly, this reality is an interruption of our reality. This interruption allows the best form of reflection because one can only truly reflect on something that surprises us and opens up a world that we are not already in. Lastly, aesthetics is only complete when the observer is caught up in her own making of beauty. This beauty that is made corresponds with what comes to her as interruption. This takes us to a closer look of what is distinct about a theological aesthetic.

### *Theological Aesthetic*

The purpose of drawing upon the history of philosophy for studying aesthetic is not to show that the metaphysics overcomes and names everything we need know about Entire Sanctification. Actually, it is quite the opposite. The reason for showing how the history of philosophy communicates aesthetic is to show how the theological aesthetic out-narrates it. This meaning: the only way to discover the peculiarity of what has been proclaimed as Entire Sanctification in the Wesleyan Holiness tradition is through the paradox of Christ crucified and resurrected. This strange aesthetic shows us the lie in our failed aesthetic claims and reveals the truth of Christian holiness.

The history of theological reflection on beauty is lacking in the entirety of the discourse with a few notable exceptions. Chief among these is Hans Urs Von Balthasar, the Swiss theologian of the twentieth century. Though there are many that come before and after him, his work on theological aesthetics, *The Glory of the Lord*, both in depth and sheer size represents the best of theological aesthetic work. In fact, it is Balthasar who suggests that the work of the theologian, as opposed to the philosopher, must start with the beautiful, he writes,

The word [beautiful] with which we embark on this first volume of a series of theological studies is a word with which the philosophical person does not begin, but rather concludes. It is a word that has never possessed a permanent place or an authentic voice in the concert of the exact sciences, and, when it *is* chosen as a subject for discussion, appears to betray in him who chooses it an idle amateur among such very busy.<sup>30</sup>

The main point in such a claim is that to begin with an accurate view of God or theology you cannot begin with logic, but with beauty. This is because it is beauty that breaks in on our reality with the revelation of God, and naming that reality is an aesthetic one for Balthasar. The revelation of God, as Balthasar writes, in the “form of Christ” causes for deep contemplation as we continually seek to understand that level of beauty. It is truly a paradox to understand, because it is an offense to our reason to see something as grotesque as the crucifixion that can only appear beautiful through revelation. As Balthasar again writes,

...a person must love Christ and have pure eyes to see his inner spiritual beauty, because for those who stand at a distance, and certainly for his persecutors, he is veiled to the point of ugliness. But his veiling of his beauty was not just inspired

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<sup>30</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Seeing the Form, Vol. I. in The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetic*, Trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, Ed. Joseph Fessiom S.J. and John Riches. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 17

by his desire to be like us, who are ugly, in all things, but also by his desire to make the ugly beautiful by his love... With this statement Augustine moves away from his first assertion that only beauty is loveable. This Platonic statement, whose audacity culminates in the idea that the lover, the eros of beauty, need not himself be beautiful, gives place to the Christian view that love for beauty in Christ creatively produces beauty.<sup>31</sup>

This is the hinge upon which my argument swings. The form of beauty in philosophical aesthetics is overcome at the cross. Beauty, in the philosophical definition, is supposed to inspire the observer to yearn for that form. However, no philosophically understood form can achieve this. Only the Christ form, as one who is disfigured in the incarnation and crucifixion, achieves the standard with which the philosophical form sets. With a philosophical aesthetic we discern that there will always be a craving to be more beautiful. The form is palpable and never can satisfy the transcendent thirst of the human nature. There is competition, in philosophical aesthetics, precisely at the intersection between the transcendent reality of the beautiful and the yearning to achieve it. The logical conclusion of philosophical aesthetics is the form can never be achieved. It is only strived after and can bask only in its momentary achievements until the next beauty comes along to create its own achievement. Theological aesthetics does not face such an issue. When we realize that the form and great mystery of beauty can never be achieved, it is given. It becomes clear you do not reason to gift you reason from gift. This gift, veiled to the point of ugliness, takes the eyes of faith to behold its splendor. At this point a strictly theological aesthetic achieves all that a philosophical aesthetic claims to do.

This is certainly how John Wesley viewed holiness and Christian Perfection. Holiness is a theological aesthetic. This is not say that John Wesley cannot be understood apart from a theological aesthetic, actually quite the contrary. John Wesley's theology of Christian Perfection has been studied apart from aesthetic theory; however it is my task to point out that the work of John Wesley typifies this 'poetic' making that beauty must ultimately entail. So it must be that what I offer is not an entirely new reading of Wesleyan theology, but I hope a new perspective.

The life that we would expect, normally, from a life that is categorized by the classification of Christian holiness would suggest a person of hyper-ethical status. This is not the point in Wesley. In fact, as Wesley points out in "The Character of a Methodist":

Nor do we desire to be distinguished by actions, customs, or usages, of an indifferent nature. Our religion does not lie in doing what God has not enjoined, or abstaining from what he hath not forbidden. It does not lie in the form of our apparel, in the posture of our body, or in the covering of our heads; nor yet in abstaining from marriage, or from meats and drinks, which are all good if received with thanksgiving. Therefore, neither will any man, who knows whereof

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<sup>31</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles, Vol. II*. In *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetic*, Trans. Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh, and Brian McNeil C.R.V. Ed. John Riches. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 1982), 135

he affirms, fix the mark of a Methodist here, - in any actions or customs purely indifferent, undetermined by the word of God.<sup>32</sup>

The point here is the point that I have sought to make from the beginning. The marks of “holiness” are not what we do in and of themselves. What we do has meaning, but the outward signs do not encompass the beauty of holiness. Rather, in the encounter with the revealed Christ something bears on the Christian. As Wesley again writes, “...he giveth thanks from the ground of his heart to Him who orders it for good...”<sup>33</sup> This is the beauty of the Wesleyan-Holiness view of Entire Sanctification, that it is achieved not by the might of the individual Christian, but by the one “...who orders it [his heart] for good...”<sup>34</sup>

So it comes to the final summation of our argument. Our question is, how can a Wesleyan-Holiness view be enhanced by aesthetic theory? The answer lies in the understanding that the aesthetic person looks/acts a particular way in response to the beautiful (Plotinus). This response is half out of frustration, but the logic of the beautiful orders our path to act differently as its interruption is so overwhelming for us to continue living the same (Kant). This acting is due to our submission to the beautiful where we are caught up in the poetry of beauty so that we can be a part of the imaginative creativity of beauty (Hegel). This is how philosophy has dealt with the issue. The strengths in the person who is formed aesthetically would fall in love with the beautiful. For this to happen, the very being of that person would change. They would act differently and be different in response to this love. This beauty in which the individual has fallen in love with was not planned, and true love/beauty cannot but be something that interrupts their life. The person is then ordered to act logically based off this interruption. This logic then makes for the individual to be caught up in love and beauty to the point that he, the individual, is responsible for living out this beauty. It may even seem that he becomes the beauty in which he so longs to be. This end can only be the ‘Good’ so sought after.

These conclusions offer what we want to say about Entire Sanctification, with a few very notable exceptions. Plotinus shows a very poignant view of how beauty achieves the good, but in the end a person can never get there. The glory of the beautiful in Christ is that he is not achieved he is given (John 3:16), or as John Wesley understood it, and is best summarized by Rowan Williams speaking of Wesley’s conversion, “...the new convert touched at last by the good news that God *gives* what we shall never earn...”<sup>35</sup> Christian perfection is never an achievement but a gift given, and it is beauty. In addition to that, it is surely true that Christ serves as an interruption of our reality, but is not logical. It is love that, in the sense that Christian *agape* is understood to be, does not function logically. For example, the logic of the cross is as David Bentley Hart points out, “Theology must, because of what its particular story is, have the form of martyrdom, witness, a peaceful offer that has already suffered rejection and

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<sup>32</sup> John Wesley, *The Character of a Methodist in The Works of John Wesley* Vol. III. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1978), 341

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 342

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 342

<sup>35</sup> Rowan Williams, *A Ray of Darkness: Sermons and Reflections*. (Chicago: Cowley, 1995) 176

must be prepared for rejection as a consequence.”<sup>36</sup> This claim is an illogical statement, at least from the Kantian perspective, but leads perfectly into our final philosophical notion. Wesley surely understood that to be holy is Christ-likeness, so the illogical actions and beauty that one encounters in Jesus are the things that one is to be caught up in. This is Christological poetics, or as Wesley would say, “...And he hath now put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering: So that he forbears and forgives, if he had a quarrel against any; even as God in Christ hath forgiven him.”<sup>37</sup> The command to ‘Be Ye Holy as I Am Holy,’ has no great expression. To recreate the beauty shown to the beauty shown to the Christian by putting on that very beauty as his, the Christian’s, own nature. This type of beauty more than overcomes any philosophical attempt to re-create it. Philosophy can surely illumine such a claim and give us a unique language, but can never incarnate it. Rather it is, in short, as Wesley assumes, “And having the mind that was in Christ, he so walks as Christ also walked.”<sup>38</sup> This is Entire Sanctification.

### Conclusion

In conclusion it is important again to deny our tendency for an ethical-achievement theory as the foundational mark of Entire Sanctification. Rather, we understand there to be a harmonious correspondence between beauty and our action in it. Moreover, let us look at a biblical image in order to make our final remarks about Entire Sanctification. It is captured in the voice of the beloved in the very first chapter of the Song of Songs. It is written, “I am black and beautiful”.<sup>39</sup> The provocative nature of this statement should signal the reader to the speaker herself. In fact, the reader is lead to believe that the person quoted here is quite uncomely by standard definition. Yet her enthusiasm in declaring before the “daughters of Jerusalem,”<sup>40</sup> signals the depth of truth in her words. The blackness of the speaker is not meant to signify any African American descent, but rather her class, most likely as a slave. This was most likely because a slave’s skin was much darker due to constant exposure to the sun. This typifies the understanding of courage of our speaker in the face of her socio-economic status. The dialectic of darkened skin versus the fair skinned royalty only explains the gulf between what the speaker’s statement (I am beautiful) and her actual beauty. However, we are meant to read this not in light of the speaker herself, but rather as the one she claims as her lover. The reason for the proclamation of beauty has everything to do with how the one who loves her in fact sees her. The one who sees her, as the reader would understand, is God. Her beauty and quality is deemed not by her own nature and acts, but as a result of her encounter with the lover, God. As Gregory of Nyssa writes, “When [the Lord] takes some black soul to himself, he makes it beautiful by communion with himself.”<sup>41</sup> This lover does not appear in the book, yet, as Robert Jenson writes,

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<sup>36</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2003), 441.

<sup>37</sup> Wesley, *The Character of a Methodist*, 343-344

<sup>38</sup> Wesley, *The Character of a Methodist*, 346

<sup>39</sup> Song of Songs 1.5, NRSV

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, the daughters of Jerusalem are understood to be divine royalty. Thus when a speaker addresses them in this manor, the reader is meant to notice her claim. We are meant to notice due to many who address royalty in this manor often paid with their lives.

<sup>41</sup> Gregory of Nyssa. *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Trans. Casimir McCambley. (Brookline: Hellenic College Press, 1987), 49.

we know "...it is he for whom she knows she is beautiful."<sup>42</sup> The love between them makes all the difference. This love, freely given, is what inspires new action and life. The metaphor for the sexual relationship present in this book is meant to show that we have no idea how much God loves us. The love changes her to act in accordance with her and the beauty given is a beauty lived. Through out the rest of the book we are given the drama between the two, and even a depiction of their love and how our speaker lives into the love imparted to her. She lives precisely in this knowledge of her radiant beauty as a gift. This is the language of the Entirely Sanctified and it is beautiful.

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<sup>42</sup> Robert W. Jenson. *Song of Songs. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching.* Ed. James L. Mays. (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2005), 22.

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