

**“Claim Me for Thy Service”:
Charles Wesley’s Vision of Servant Vocation**

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In one of the great Trinitarian hymns included in John and Charles Wesley’s *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*, the singer beseeches God:

Claim me for Thy service, claim
All I have and all I am.

Take my soul and body’s powers,
 Take my memory, mind, and will,
All my goods, and all my hours,
 All I know, and all I feel,
All I think, and speak, and do;
Take my heart—but make it new.¹

The disciple of Christ asks the Three-One God to claim every aspect of his or her life in an oblation that can only be described as covenantal. In typical Wesleyan fashion, a series of “alls” characterizes the plea. All I have, all I am, all my goods, all my hours, all I know, feel, think, speak, and do. The all-encompassing sacrifice of self—the offer of one’s whole being in service to God—rests secure, as Charles makes abundantly clear throughout, on the foundation of a heart transformed by God’s prevenient action. In hymns like this one, Charles Wesley cultivates a profound vision of servant vocation, a missional conception of Christian discipleship summarized tersely in the simple phrase: “Claim me for Thy service.”

One can hear echoes of the baptismal covenant, perhaps, in Charles’s use of language. The

¹John and Charles Wesley, *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* (Bristol: Farley, 1745), 155:3-4. Hereinafter *HLS*.

Sacrament of Baptism, of course, is that place where discipleship begins, that event in which God claims each person as God's own. It also signals the commitment of the individual and the community to God's mission. The ambiance of many Wesley hymns elicits a profoundly missiological vision of Christian community and engagement with the dominion of God in the world. Despite the centrality of this missional ecclesiology to the Wesleyan movement, few scholars have examined the missiology of Charles Wesley and the contribution of his hymns to the concept of servant vocation in the early Methodist heritage. Before his untimely death, Tore Meistad explored this theme in a preliminary way and even sought to link the Wesleyan concept of mission with the Eastern Church.² In this brief essay I hope to build upon his insights as we examine Charles Wesley's understanding of service or self-sacrifice as the orienting principle of his missiological vision of Christian vocation.

Jesus, of course, functions as the primary exemplar and mentor in Charles's development of this vision. His frequent use of the ancient kenotic hymn (Phil. 2:5-11, particularly verse 7) elevates self-sacrificial love in Jesus' own character and mission in the world. After an examination of this foundational portrait I turn my attention to Charles's conception of conformity to the mind of Christ in light of the kenotic imagery of his hymns. In several signature hymn texts from the "For Believers Working" section of the 1780 *Collection of Hymns for the use of the People Called Methodists*, he develops something approaching a "theology of servant ministry" along these lines. I conclude with an examination of Wesley's concept of self-sacrifice

²See Tore Meistad, "The Missiology of Charles Wesley and Its Links to the Eastern Church," in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, ed. S T Kimbrough, Jr. (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 205-31. Kimbrough has given some attention to this theme, an implicit concern of much of his scholarship on Charles.

as it relates to the Sacrament, particularly as developed in the final section of the brothers' *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, and demonstrate how this sacramental paradigm of sacrificial servanthood both shapes and reflects Charles's understanding of Christian vocation.

I. The Servant-Mind of Christ

Charles Wesley's Lyrical Settings of Philippians 2:5-11

In his examination of “*Kenosis* in the Nativity Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian and Charles Wesley,” S T Kimbrough, Jr. claims that both of these important theologians “view God’s self-emptying, self-limitation, and self-effacement in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ as the foundational foci for Christian spirituality.”³ They drew these images, of course, from St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians in which he reminds the community to imitate the Christ of whom they sing in one of the earliest hymns of the church:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God, did not
regard equality with God as something to be
exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a
slave, being born in human likeness. And being
found in human form, he humbled himself and
became obedient to death—even death on a cross.
Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him
the name that is above every name, so that at the
name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven
and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue
should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory
of God the Father (5-11, NRSV).

This so-called *kenotic* hymn figures prominently in the sacred poetry of Charles Wesley. Owing

³S T Kimbrough, Jr., “*Kenosis* in the Nativity Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian and Charles Wesley,” in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, ed. S T Kimbrough, Jr. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 265.

perhaps to the influence of Nicolas von Zinzendorf, the concept of *kenosis*—or self-emptying—was taken up and elaborated theologically as a theory of the incarnation.⁴ It is not my purpose here to speculate about possible Pietistic influence upon Charles through the Zinzendorf connection or to discuss the Christological implications of this concept; rather, I am interested in how the *kenotic* imagery associated with Jesus functions as a paradigm for faithful Christian discipleship in the hymns of Charles.

Although Wesley provides no lyrical paraphrase of this Philippians hymn in his *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures* of 1762, allusions to the hymn can be found widely in his other collections.⁵ In the Wesleys' *Hymns and Sacred Poems* of 1742, Charles reflects on St. Paul's introduction to the ancient hymn in a twenty stanza lyrical paraphrase of "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5).⁶ The brothers publish thirteen of these stanzas in their 1780 *Collection*, verses describing Christ's mind in turn as quiet, gentle, patient, noble, spotless, loving, thankful, constant, and perfect.⁷ One of Wesley's most effective paraphrases of the *kenotic* hymn itself, however, comes in a four stanza hymn entitled "to be sung

⁴See the discussion and critique of this Christological theory in D. M. Bailey, *God Was In Christ: An Essay on Incarnation and Atonement* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 94-98.

⁵Space only permits the examination of the most pertinent texts here. For an example of Wesley's pervasive use of the Philippians text in the major Wesleyan hymn collection, see Franz Hildebrandt and Oliver A. Beckerlegge, eds., *The Works of John Wesley. Volume 7. A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 101, 108, 118, 193, 197, 246, 265, 315-16, 421, 476, 507, 508, 520, 522, 524, 527, 531, 534, 577, 626, 644, 678, 697, 710. Hereinafter *Hymns* (1780).

⁶John and Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (Bristol: Farley, 1742), 221-23. Hereinafter *HSP* (1742).

⁷*Hymns* (1780), Hymn 345; verses 1-2, 7, 9-10, 13-20 from the original.

at Work,” beginning “Son of the Carpenter, receive,” published in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739).⁸ Attribution of this hymn to Charles remains uncertain, but the brothers published the last three verses of the hymn in the 1780 *Collection* as one of the lead selections in the section “For Believers Working.”⁹ Since this hymn focuses on the believer’s quest to conform to the mind of Christ, rather than on the character of Jesus per se, I will examine the text in greater detail in the second section of the paper dealing with the *kenotic* paradigm of Christian discipleship.

In another extremely significant hymn of the same 1739 collection—not to be confused with the famous “atonement hymn” with the same first line—Wesley explores the titles of Christ. Four verses of the fifteen afford what may be his most profound exposition of the *kenotic* theme:

Arise, my soul, arise,
Thy Saviour’s sacrifice!
All the names that love could find,
All the forms that love could take,
Jesus in himself has joined,
Thee, my soul, his own to make.

Equal with God most high,
He laid his glory by:
He th’eternal God was born,
Man with men he deigned t’appear,
Object of his creature’s scorn,
Pleased a servant’s form to wear.

High above every name,
Jesus, the great I AM!
Bows to Jesus every knee,
Things in heaven, and earth, and hell;
Saints adore him, demons flee,
Fiends, and men, and angels feel.

⁸John and Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: Strahan, 1739), 193-94. Hereinafter *HSP* (1739).

⁹*Hymns* (1780), Hymn 313.

He left his throne above,
Emptied of all but love:
Whom the heavens cannot contain,
God vouchsafed a worm to appear,
Lord of glory, Son of man,
Poor, and vile, and abject here.¹⁰

Self-emptying: The Kenotic Paradigm

Three primary themes of a *kenotic* paradigm emerge from this hymn, namely, humility, estrangement, and self-emptying. The God revealed in the incarnation is a self-humbling God. The *Nativity Hymns*, as Kimbrough has pointed out, provide some of the most powerful imagery related to a God “humbled to the dust.”¹¹ Wesley’s paraphrase of the *Gloria in Excelsis* elevates the paradoxical connection between Christ’s humiliation with his exaltation; the hymn writer binds humility and glory together as one:

See the eternal Son of God,
A mortal son of man,
Dwelling in the earthly clod,
Whom heaven cannot contain!¹²

This paradox extends to the concept of estrangement as well. Again, Kimbrough observes:

“Charles Wesley comprehends well this dimension of *kenosis*, when he writes:

¹⁰*HSP* (1739), 165-68; verses 1-2, 9-10. The Wesleys published versions of this hymn in three other collections: John and Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (London: Strahan, 1753), Hymn 40 [hereinafter *HSS* (1753)] and John Wesley, *Select Hymns* (London: n.p., 1761), Hymn 97, both hymns consisting of fifteen verses, as well, with one from 1739 omitted and another added. The hymn is reduced to nine verses in *Hymns* (1780), Hymn 187; verses 1-4, 8-12.

¹¹Kimbrough, “*Kenosis*,” 271, quoting Charles Wesley, *Hymns for the Nativity of our Lord* (London: Strahan, 1744), Hymn 4:3. Hereinafter *Nativity Hymns*.

¹²*Nativity Hymns*, Hymn 4:3.

Wrapped in swathes the immortal stranger,
Man with men,
We have seen
Lying in a manger.”¹³

Father Francis Frost explored the same dynamic understanding of estrangement in Wesley’s religious verse in an exceptionally incisive essay entitled “The Veiled Unveiling of the Glory of God in the Eucharistic Hymns of Charles Wesley: The Self-Emptying Glory of God.”¹⁴ Frost appropriates the language of the well-known line of “Hark, the herald angels sing,” “Veil’d in flesh, the Godhead see,” in an effort to articulate the central mystery of the incarnation.¹⁵ All the *kenotic* themes converge as we “sound the depths” of the incarnate God of love. Frost attempts to articulate the central paradox:

The self-emptying is also a veiling of the Godhead. Why? Jesus did not cease to be God in the self-emptying. Precisely because the very love which *is* God is in the self-emptying, the self-emptying is a manifestation of the Godhead. But it is an unveiling of it in veiling. The love unveils itself in the veiling of self-emptying.¹⁶

The essence of the *kenotic* paradigm, therefore, and the key to the mystery of love, is self-emptying. The concept is everywhere in Charles’s poetry. In his *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* we sing, “He came self-emptied from above, / That we might live through him.”¹⁷ “Jesus, Thou art

¹³Kimbrough, “*Kenosis*,” 270, quoting *Nativity Hymns*, Hymn 6:3.

¹⁴Francis Frost, “The Veiled Unveiling of the Glory of God in the Eucharistic Hymns of Charles Wesley: The Self-Emptying Glory of God,” *Proceedings of The Charles Wesley Society* 2 (1995): 87-99.

¹⁵*HSP* (1739), 207.

¹⁶Frost, “The Veiled Unveiling,” 88. Frost also quotes the famous statement of Charles de Foucauld in this context: “Self-lowering is of the essence of love.”

¹⁷*HLS*, Hymn 60, “Come to the feast, for Christ invites”

the' Anointed One," Wesley confesses, "Who camest self-emptied from the sky."¹⁸ Pondering with Mary the miraculous nature of Jesus' birth, Charles observes:

Emptied of all his majesty:
O may I always bear in mind
The Saviour's pity for mankind,
Which brought Him from His throne,
Emptied of all His majesty,
A Man of griefs to comfort me,
And make my heart His own.¹⁹

In his famous hymn entitled "Free Grace," published in the 1739 collection and more popularly known by the opening line, "And can it be, that I should gain," Wesley condenses the whole *kenotic* doctrine into a single line:

He left his Father's throne above
 (So free, so infinite his grace!),
Emptied himself of all but love,
 And bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For, O my God, it found out me!²⁰

No image of self-emptying impresses itself on our minds with greater veracity than the pervasive and distinctive phrase, "Emptied himself of all but love." It is there in his *Nativity Hymns*:

All-wise, all-good, almighty Lord,
Jesus, by highest heaven adored,
Ere time its course began,
How did thy glorious mercy stoop
To take thy fallen nature up,
When thou thyself wert man?

¹⁸Charles Wesley, *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures*, 2 vols. (Bristol: Farley, 1762), Hymn 271. Hereinafter *Scripture Hymns*.

¹⁹*Scripture Hymns* (1762), Hymn on Luke 2:19, verse 1.

²⁰*HSP* (1739), 117-18; verse 3; *Hymns* (1780), Hymn 193:3. Emphasis added.

The eternal God from heaven came down,
The King of glory dropped his crown,
And veil'd his majesty;
Emptied of all but love he came,
Jesus, I call thee by the name
Thy pity bore for me.²¹

We find it in Wesley's paraphrase of Job 23:3:

O that I knew the way to find
That Saviour of our sinful kind,
That Friend of misery!
Who left His blissful realms above,
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And died to ransom me!²²

Although found in his hymns as early as 1739, a close examination of this phrase in the 1741 *Collection of Psalms and Hymns* may even provide some clue to its origin—perhaps the editorial work of John rather than the creative mind of Charles:

He left true bliss and joy above,
Emptied himself of all but love;
For me He freely did forsake
More than from me He e'er can take:
A mortal life for a divine
He took, and did even that resign.²³

This hymn is actually a very careful redaction (improvement?) of one verse from “The Resignation,” a religious poem by the Cambridge Platonist, John Norris, published in his *Collection of Miscellanies* in 1692, the original of which reads:

He left true Bliss and Joys above,

²¹*Nativity Hymns*, Hymn 15:1-2.

²²*Scripture Hymns*, Hymn on Job. 23:3.

²³John Wesley, *A Collection of Psalms and Hymns* (London: Strahan, 1741), The Resignation, ll. 25-36. Hereinafter *CPH* (1741).

Himself he *emptied* of all good, but *love*:
For me he freely did forsake
More good, than he *from* me *can* ever *take*.
A *mortal* life for a *Divine*
He took, and did at last even *that* resign.²⁴

In a brilliant essay on “‘Experimental and Practical Divinity’: Charles Wesley and John Norris,” Dick Watson suggests the many ways in which Norris may have influenced the younger poet, but makes no mention of this particular connection to the Wesleyan corpus.²⁵ Regardless, whether originally John’s or Charles’s in its original form, the younger brother takes ownership over the idea and, as Father Frost has observed: “‘Emptied of all but love He came.’ That is a poetic way of intimating, not so much that Jesus manifests his love for us in the absence of all else, as that the love is in the very self emptying.”²⁶

Footwashing: The Servant Character of Christ

In Jesus’ life among his followers, nowhere was this self-emptying love manifest more poignantly than in the Upper Room. Here, among his closest friends, Jesus translates humility, estrangement, and self-emptying into a profound sign-act in his washing of the disciples’ feet (John 13:1-20). Jesus acts out the meaning of the incarnation. He demonstrates the paradoxical lesson that greatness in the community of his disciples is to be measured in terms of willingness to

²⁴John Norris, *A Collection of Miscellanies. Consisting of poems, essays, discourses & letters, occasionally written*. 2nd edn. (London: Printed for J. Crosley, and Samuel Manship, 1692), 107; “The Resignation,” v. 5.

²⁵J. Richard Watson, “‘Experimental and Practical Divinity’: Charles Wesley and John Norris,” *Proceedings of The Charles Wesley Society* 6 (1999-2000): 59-72.

²⁶Frost, “The Veiled Unveiling,” 87.

serve.²⁷ Jesus left no doubt that he is the chief of all servants who invites all into the ministry of self-emptying love. In Charles Wesley's lyrical exposition of John 13, all of the *kenotic* themes converge into a compelling portrait of life in a self-emptied Lord whose example compels others into the path of *kenotic* service for others:

Jesu, by highest heavens adored,
The church's glorious Head;
With humble joy I call Thee, Lord,
And in Thy footsteps tread.
Emptied of all Thy greatness here
While in the body seen,
Thou wouldst the least of all appear,
And minister to men.

A servant to Thy servants Thou
In Thy debased estate,
How meekly did Thy goodness bow
To wash Thy followers' feet!
And shall a worm refuse to stoop,
His fellow-worms disdain?
I give my vain distinctions up,
Since God did wait on man.

At charity's almighty call
I lay my greatness by,
The least of saints, I wait on all,
The chief of sinners I.
Happy, if I their grief may cheer,
And mitigate their pain,
And wait upon the servants here,
Till with the Lord I reign.²⁸

II. Conformity to the Mind of Christ

²⁷See my treatment of the theme of *diakonia* in Wesleyan theology in *Recapturing the Wesleys' Vision: An Introduction to the Faith of John and Charles Wesley* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 91-118.

²⁸Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 2 vols. (Bristol: Farley, 1749), vol. 2, Hymns for Believers, "Before Any Work of Charity;" Hymn 12.

“The servant shall be as his Lord”

In his hymns Charles Wesley relentlessly articulates God’s invitation to allow the Spirit to conform the mind, the life, the “image” of the disciple to that of Christ. He enunciates this central theme in a unique formulation of Matthew 10:25, “it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher,” first expressed, perhaps, in his “Thanksgiving” hymn of 1742:

My spirit meek, my will resigned,
Lowly as thine shall be my mind—
The servant shall be as his Lord.²⁹

For Charles, this call to conformity to Christ defines the disciple—it characterizes the Christian who is altogether God’s—but it is also a promise. In virtually every hymn in which this phrase appears, it implies both a demand and a gift. “I stay me on thy faithful word,” cries the follower of Christ “Groaning for Redemption,” “The servant shall be as his Lord.”³⁰ In the powerful hymn, “Prisoners of hope,” this statement of vocation and promise functions as the refrain for the concluding stanzas:

Thou wilt perform thy faithful word:
“The servant shall be as his Lord.”

We only hang upon thy word,
“The servant shall be as his Lord.”³¹

Called to service, the service itself becomes God’s greatest gift.

²⁹*HSP* (1742), 170; *Hymns* (1780), Hymn 355:5; portions of the hymn also appearing in *HSS* (1753) and John Wesley, *Select Hymns*, 2nd edn. (London: n.p., 1765).

³⁰*HSP* (1742), 80; *Hymns* (1780), Hymn 364:1.

³¹*HSP* (1742), 234:11, 13; *Hymns* (1780), Hymn 369, which includes only nine of the original thirteen stanzas. Cf. *HSP* (1749), vol. 2, Hymn 25:7: “We rest on His word / We shall here be restored / To His image; the servant shall be as his Lord.”

The fifth section of Part Four of the Wesleys' 1780 *Collection of Hymns* includes eight selections "For Believers Working." In these hymns Wesley elevates this call to servant ministry in conformity to Christ. I return here, therefore, to the hymn mentioned earlier, "Son of the Carpenter, receive," as it deals with the *kenotic* paradigm of Christian discipleship and the disciple's imitation of the Master:

Servant of all, to toil for man
Thou didst not, Lord refuse;
Thy Majesty did not disdain
To be employed for us!

Thy bright example I pursue,
To thee in all things rise;
And all I think, or speak, or do,
Is one great sacrifice.

Careless through outward cares I go,
From all distraction free;
My hands are but engaged below—
My heart is still with thee.³²

Wesley presents at least three critical insights in this brief hymn. First, Christ takes upon himself the form of a servant because this is the nature of God's love. Second, imitation of Christ requires the sacrifice of one's whole self to God. Finally, only those who bind themselves to Christ and work the works of God are truly free in life.

The hymns of this section enunciate some of the other primary themes of servant ministry as well. Wesley links the significance of the disciple's service to the sacrifice of Christ. "Jesu, this mean oblation join / To thy great sacrifice. Stamped with an infinite desert / My work he then

³²*HSP* (1739), 193-94; verses 2-4; *Hymns* (1780), Hymn 313.

shall own.”³³ The servant of God pursues his or her “daily labor” in order to walk in a closer fellowship with God: “In all my works thy presence find.”³⁴ Service is its own reward.

Joyful thus my faith to show,
I find his service my reward;
Every work I do below
I do it to the Lord.³⁵

In what might be called the “signature hymn” of this section of the Wesleys’ *Collection*, “O thou who camest from above,” Charles articulates one of his most critical insights related to Christian servanthood: “Increase in us the kindled fire, / In us the work of faith fulfil.” Reflecting upon this couplet, Oliver Beckerlegge observed:

It should not be forgotten that the early Methodist Conferences were “Conversations about the work *of* God”, not the work of man for God! The flame of faith can be lit only from outside and above—it is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Christ is the subject and agent.³⁶

But what is the character of this graciously enabled labor of love?

The Practice of Christian Service

Charles Wesley goes to great lengths to specify the character of Christian service. First, the servant simply offers to others what he or she has freely received from God. Harkening back to the episode in which Jesus washes his disciples’ feet in the Upper Room, Wesley reveals the heart of the “primitive Christian:”

³³*Hymns* (1780), Hymn 312:3-4.

³⁴*Hymns* (1780), Hymn 315:2. From “Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go.”

³⁵*Hymns* (1780), Hymn 316:2.

³⁶*Hymns* (1780), 474.

O might my lot be cast with these,
The least of Jesu's witnesses!
O that my Lord would count me meet
To wash his dear disciples' feet!

This only thing do I require:
Thou know'st 'tis all my heart's desire
Freely what I receive to give,
The servant of thy church to live.³⁷

Servants, in other words, engage in evangelism—offering God's grace to all in word and in deed.

After preaching on one occasion at Gwennap Pit in Cornwall, Charles celebrated this aspect of service to God: "All thanks be to God, / Who scatters abroad / Through every place, / By the least of his servants, his savour of grace!"³⁸ The unique feature of Wesley's vision, however, is the way in which he connects the sharing of grace with the restoration of the mind of Christ in the believer. In a composite hymn, opening with a lyrical paraphrase of "Jesus and the woman at the well" (John 4:10-15), Wesley conjoins the "mind" of Philippians 2 with the "action" of James 1:

Thy mind throughout my life be shown,
While listening to the wretch's cry,
The widow's and the orphan's groan,
On mercy's wings I swiftly fly
The poor and helpless to relieve,
My life, my all for them to give.³⁹

To have the mind of Christ, in other words, is to care for the poor.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Jesus' words concerning the judgment of the nations in Matthew 25 should figure prominently in his depiction of authentic discipleship and Christian

³⁷*Hymns* (1780), Hymn 17:7-8.

³⁸Charles Wesley, *Hymns for those that seek, and those that have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus Christ* (London: Strahan, 1747), 3; Hymn 3:1. Hereinafter *Redemption Hymns*.

³⁹*Scripture Hymns* (1762), vol. 2, 380; Hymn 738; *Hymns* (1780), Hymn 354:4.

service. Wesley's lyrical formulation of the pertinent text comes, of all places, in a hymn written for Charles's bride, Sarah Gwynn, on the occasion of their wedding:

Come let us arise,
And press to the skies;
The summons obey,
My friend, my beloved, and hasten away!
The Master of all
For our service doth call,
And deigns to approve
With smiles of acceptance our labour of love.

His burden who bear,
We alone can declare
How easy his yoke;
While to love and good works we each other provoke,
By word and by deed,
The bodies in need,
The souls to relieve,
And freely as Jesus hath given to give.

Then let us attend
Our heavenly friend
In his members distressed,
By want, or affliction, or sickness oppressed;
The prisoner relieve,
The stranger receive,
Supply all their wants,
And spend and be spent in assisting his saints.⁴⁰

The early Methodist people, like their leaders, took this "call to serve the present age" with utmost seriousness. They lived out their lives in solidarity with those people who were shut out, neglected, and thrown away. Charles admonished his followers to befriend the poor and needy. In his *Songs for the Poor*, S T Kimbrough, Jr. rediscovers some of Wesley's most profound expressions of this servant spirit, including this composite hymn drawn from his

⁴⁰HSP (1749), vol. 2, 280.

manuscript poems on Luke and Acts:

The poor as Jesus' bosom-friends,
the poor he makes his latest care,
to all his followers commends,
and wills us on our hands to bear;
the poor our dearest care we make,
and love them for our Savior's sake.⁴¹

Charles was quick to point out those persons in whom this lofty ideal of gracious condescension was realized. He provides the following portrait of an early Methodist woman, Elizabeth Blackwell, whose character was shaped by her practice of befriending the least in her community:

Nursing the poor with constant care,
Affection soft, and heart-esteem,
She saw her Saviour's image there,
And gladly minister'd to Him.⁴²

Grace Bowen rejoiced “an hungry Christ to feed” and “to visit Him in pain.” To the poor, Wesley observes, this servant gave her all.⁴³

III. Eucharist and Self-Sacrifice

The Cross-shaped Life

Conformity to the mind of Christ—to live and serve in this world upon the model of Jesus—ultimately means conformity to the cross as well. “When Christ calls a man,” as Dietrich

⁴¹S T Kimbrough, Jr., ed., *Songs for the Poor* (New York: GBGM, 1993), Hymn 3.

⁴²Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.*, 2 vols. (London: John Mason, 1849; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 2:386. Hereinafter *CWJ*.

⁴³*CWJ*, 2:324.

Bonhoeffer observed in *The Cost of Discipleship*, “he bids him come and die.”⁴⁴ Personal sacrifice characterizes the authentic Christian life. As my own theological mentor, Dr. Robert Cushman, said on many occasions, “The cross-shaped life is the only authentic Christian existence.” The “suffering servants” of God take up their crosses daily in multifarious acts of self-sacrificial love.

Thy every suffering servant, Lord,
Shall as his perfect Master be;
To all thy inward life restored,
And outwardly conformed to thee.⁴⁵

“And lo!” cries the faithful disciple, “I come thy cross to share, / Echo thy sacrificial prayer, / And with my Saviour die.”⁴⁶ Nowhere do the images of self-emptying, service, and sacrifice—the signs of the cruciform life—converge more poignantly than in the *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*.

The Wesleys divided the 166 hymns of this 1745 collection into six sections, the fourth and fifth of which deal specifically with the issue of sacrifice. In Charles Wesley’s sermon on Acts 20:7 (more properly what might be described as an introductory “treatise” to a larger, unfinished work on the Sacrament) we encounter a concept of sacrifice consonant with the view he espouses in his *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* devoted to this theme. Charles views the Lord’s Supper as a “re-presentation” of the sacrifice of Christ.⁴⁷ As J. Ernest Rattenbury demonstrated, his stress is persistently on the two-fold oblation of the church in the Sacrament; the body of Christ offered is

⁴⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 7.

⁴⁵*Hymns* (1780), Hymn 321:5.

⁴⁶Charles Wesley, *Hymns for the Use of Families* (Bristol: Pine, 1767), 21. Hereinafter *Family Hymns* (1767).

⁴⁷Kenneth G. C. Newport, ed., *The Sermons of Charles Wesley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 277-86. Cf. John Bowmer, *The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper* (London: Dacre, 1951), 223-32.

not merely a sacred symbol of Christ's "once-for-all" act of redemption, but is also the living sacrifice of the people of God.⁴⁸

The thirty hymns of Section Five in this collection, "Concerning the Sacrifice of our Persons," focus upon this living oblation of the church and all who seek to be faithful disciples of their Lord. The desire to "be all like Thee," inevitably leads to the heartfelt prayer, "Grant us full conformity, / Plunge us deep into Thy death."⁴⁹ Wesley describes the full extent of solidarity with the crucified Lord:

His servants shall be
With Him on the tree,
Where Jesus was slain
His crucified servants shall always remain.⁵⁰

Suffering for the sake of love identifies those who are truly bound to Christ. In a profoundly anamnetic hymn placing the believer at the foot of the cross, Wesley asks the rhetorical question, "Would the Saviour of mankind / Without His people die?" The question elicits one of the most powerful images in the eucharistic hymns: "No, to Him we all are join'd / As more than standers by." Given the fact that Christ took the suffering of the world freely upon himself, even to the point of death on a cross, "We attend the slaughter'd Lamb, / And suffer for His cause."⁵¹ Hardly a mission for the faint of heart, the path of discipleship requires all one has and all one is.

In the eucharistic hymns Wesley develops what might be called a *sursum corda* principle.

⁴⁸See J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1948), 123-47.

⁴⁹*HLS*, 154:3.

⁵⁰*HLS*, 142:3.

⁵¹*HLS*, 131:1.

In the Prayer of Great Thanksgiving used in contemporary United Methodist congregations and drawn from the ancient practice of the church the faithful “lift up their hearts” to the Lord, and this “up-lifting” provides a paradigm of the oblation of life offered up to God in Christ. In this act or gesture of self-oblation, the Christian confirms to God, “I offer my whole self to you anew.” In the language of Charles’s poetry: “Ourselves we offer up to God, / Implunged in His atoning blood.” Despite the limited or partial nature of our self-sacrificial acts, God accepts them and joins them to Christ’s oblation:

Mean are our noblest offerings,
Poor feeble unsubstantial things;
But when to Him our souls we lift,
The altar sanctifies the gift.⁵²

Another sacrificial hymn makes these connections even more explicit:

Thou art with all Thy members here,
In this tremendous mystery
We jointly before God appear,
To offer up ourselves with Thee.

True followers of our bleeding Lamb,
Now on Thy daily cross we die,
And, mingled in a common flame,
Ascend triumphant to the sky.⁵³

The sacrificial character of the Christian life, in which the worshiper participates repeatedly at the table of the Lord, and its relationship to the sacrifice of Christ is clarified in Charles’ hymns. In this regard, Wesley adheres very closely to the position articulated in Daniel Brevint’s *The Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice*, an important theological treatise he reprinted as

⁵²*HLS*, 137:4-5.

⁵³*HLS*, 141:7-8.

a “preface” to his hymns. “The main intention of Christ herein was not the bare *remembrance* of His Passion;” claims Brevint, “but over and above, to invite us to His Sacrifice”:⁵⁴

While faith th’ atoning blood applies,
Ourselves a living sacrifice
 We freely offer up to God;
And none but those His glory share,
Who crucified with Jesus are,
 And follow where their Saviour trod.

Saviour, to Thee our lives we give,
Our meanest sacrifice receive,
 And to Thine own oblation join,
Our suffering and triumphant Head,
Through all Thy states Thy members lead,
 And seat us on the throne Divine.⁵⁵

The Living Sacrifice of Romans 12

St. Paul’s word to the Roman Christians, “to present your bodies as a living sacrifice” (12:1), clearly alluded to in this hymn, provides the foundation upon which the disciple builds this *kenotic*, self-sacrificial vision of life. With regard to the offering, Wesley clarifies several important points in the hymns. First, the Spirit makes our self-sacrifice possible. To live as Christ lived means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. “Yes, Lord, we are Thine,” confesses Wesley, “And gladly resign / Our souls to be fill’d with the fullness Divine.”⁵⁶ Second, the offering is holistic, involving both soul and body; Wesley guards against any false separation of the spiritual from the physical in the life of the believer. “Our souls and bodies we resign,” claims Wesley, “With joy we

⁵⁴Rattenbury, *Eucharistic Hymns*, 178.

⁵⁵*HLS*, 128:3-4.

⁵⁶*HLS*, 156:4.

render Thee / Our all, no longer ours, but Thine / Through all eternity!⁵⁷ Third, we restore to God what God has already freely given. “Now, O God, Thine own I am,” affirms the servant of the Lord, “Now I give Thee back Thy own.”⁵⁸ Fourth, self-sacrifice, while an act of obedience and compliance, roots us in love; self-giving love and God are one. Wesley expresses all of these themes eloquently in a hymn of supplication echoing the words of the prayer after Communion in the liturgy of the *Book of Common Prayer*:

Father, on us the Spirit bestow,
Through which Thine everlasting Son
Offer'd Himself for man below,
That *we*, even *we*, before Thy throne
Our souls and bodies may present,
And pay Thee all Thy grace hath lent.

O let Thy Spirit sanctify
Whate'er to Thee we now restore,
And make us with Thy will comply;
With all our mind, and soul, and power
Obey Thee, as Thy saints above,
In perfect innocence and love.⁵⁹

In those hymns in which Philippians 2:5-11 figures prominently, Charles Wesley develops a *kenotic* paradigm of servant ministry—a vision of servant vocation—Jesus himself being the primary exemplar as the One who seeks to serve others in life. Wesley demonstrates how conformity to this servant-mind characterizes all who seek to be faithful disciples and practice

⁵⁷*HLS*, 157:4.

⁵⁸*HLS*, 155:5.

⁵⁹*HLS*, 150. Following the rubrics of the 1662 BCP, after the congregation has received the Sacrament, the priest prays: “O Lord and heavenly Father, we thy humble servants desire thy Fatherly goodness mercifully to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee, etc.”

Christian service. In his hymns on the Eucharist, he emphasizes the centrality of the cross-shaped life. The Sacrament functions both to exemplify the living sacrifice of Romans 12 and to form the followers of Christ into those who sacrifice self for the sake of the world—those God claims for service for the sake of love. S T Kimbrough, Jr. expresses it succinctly: “to be emptied of everything but love is what it means to serve a God who is Christ was emptied of all but love.”⁶⁰

We conclude, therefore, where we began, with lines from the hymn described by J. Ernest Rattenbury as “perhaps the greatest hymn of personal consecration in our language”:⁶¹

Claim me for Thy service, claim
All I have and all I am.

Take my soul and body’s powers,
Take my memory, mind, and will,
All my goods, and all my hours,
All I know, and all I feel,
All I think, and speak, and do;
Take my heart—but make it new.

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
One in Three, and Three in One,
As by the celestial host
Let Thy will on earth be done;
Praise by all to Thee be given,
Glorious Lord of earth and heaven.⁶²

⁶⁰Kimbrough, “*Kenosis*,” 283.

⁶¹Rattenbury, *Eucharistic Hymns*, 126.

⁶²*HLS*, 155:3-4, 6.