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**The Concept of Sacrifice in the Theology of the Eucharistic Hymns of Charles Wesley**

**by**

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## **DEDICATION AND THANKS**

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I dedicate this work to my beautiful wife Joy and our precious child Naomi Hazel McEwen.

## **ABSTRACT**

John and Charles Wesley's Eucharistic hymnal, *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, was their second most popular hymnal during their lifetime. This thesis explores the vocabulary and imagery of the atonement in this collection of hymns. Following the introduction is a consideration of the historical context in which the Eucharistic hymnal was produced. Although John and Charles Wesley are thoroughly Protestant, there is no hesitation to use the word 'sacrifice' in this collection of hymns. Before exploring the theology and imagery of the atonement, their use of sacrifice must be clearly understood. After exploring the theology of the atonement presented in the imagery and vocabulary, the theology in the Eucharistic hymnal is contrasted with their theology presented in their correspondence and sermons. The conclusion aims to provide not only a summary but also an application for this Eucharistic theology today. *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* uses imagery and vocabulary related to the sacrament and the poetry throughout the hymnal, from cover to cover, describes the theology of the atonement. Whether it is the imagery of bread and wine, or the vocabulary of covenant and ransom, the atonement is central to the theology of this hymnal.

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## Introduction

John and Charles Wesley published the first edition of the Eucharistic hymnal, *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, in 1745. By 1786 this hymnal underwent nine editions, and with the exception of the major 1780 hymnal, *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* experienced the widest circulation of all the Wesley hymnals.<sup>1</sup> The major significance of the 166 hymns in this collection is the doctrine of atonement, which "...can be constructed more readily from its pages than from any other of their works."<sup>2</sup> J. Ernest Rattenbury's work, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns*, has a chapter on "The Wesleys' doctrine of the atonement and the modern mind." In that chapter he writes, "While it is right, perhaps desirable, to discuss the doctrine of Atonement, which was never formulated as a standard dogma of Methodism, it must always be remembered that a rejection of its substance would imply the end of the evangelical system of theology."<sup>3</sup> Ole Borgen's book, *John Wesley on the Sacrament*, contains a similar view of atonement and the church today:

We may not want to use Wesley's language of sacrifice. But his emphasis upon Christ's atonement and intercession, springing out of the love of God, is absolutely necessary. The subsequent ideas of offering ourselves and all that we are and have to God on the basis of Christ's sacrifice for us becomes essential and crucial when we realize the basic hypocrisy at this point in the lives of many, if not most, of the Christians of our time. In short, without a recovery, not necessarily of the conceptual framework and practice, but of the substance of Wesley's theology of the sacraments and the means of grace, the future of the Methodist Church as the living body of Christ is rather doubtful.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley Hymns*. (London: Epworth Press, 1942), 68.

<sup>2</sup> Rattenbury, *Evangelical Doctrines*, 68.

<sup>3</sup> Rattenbury, *Evangelical Doctrines*, 204.

<sup>4</sup> Ole E. Borgen. *John Wesley on the Sacraments*. (Michigan: Francis Asbury Press, 1972), 282.

Atonement is an essential doctrine for evangelical theology, and since John and Charles Wesley's second most popular hymnal is filled with imagery and vocabulary used to convey the doctrine of atonement, this hymnal is an invaluable resource for contemporary Methodist theology. John and Charles Wesley were convinced that through the Lord's Supper, celebrated in song with the vocabulary and imagery of the atonement, the Church would be safeguarded from both heresy and apathy.

While much has been written concerning *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, it has been said that some may "...not find Wesley's examination of the meaning of the Atonement altogether satisfactory ...."<sup>5</sup> Again there is no formal systematic theology written by John or Charles. A study of their theology provides an interesting challenge since they did not write any formal systematic theology or extensive biblical commentaries and in order to discover a "Wesleyan" theology, it has been said that one must examine:

The *Sermons* – the *Notes* – the *Hymns*. These are the standard books of Wesleyan doctrine. Only the *Sermons* and *Notes* are 'official' documents; but it is highly doubtful whether without the *Hymns* there could have been a Methodist revival. 'Methodism was born in song.' ...It is worth noting ...where other traditions refer to Articles and Confessions of Faith, Methodists (while accepting the historic creeds) find their doctrine expressed in three sets of Biblical exposition: *Sermons, Notes, Hymns*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> J. Ernest Rattenbury. *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley*. (London: Epworth Press, 1948), 28.

<sup>6</sup> Franz Hildebrandt and Oliver A. Beckerlegge, eds. *A Collection of Hymns for the People Called Methodists* (vol. 7 of *The Works of John Wesley* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 1. (*The Works of John Wesley Bi-Centennial Edition* will be abbreviated as *WJW*).

It is also worth noting that the hymns “served at least three purposes: catechetical, liturgical, and devotional.”<sup>7</sup> The catechetical and devotional component to *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* is obvious when one considers the concluding hymn which consists of twenty-two stanzas. The hymns of John and his brother Charles obviously play a significant role in Wesleyan theology and the Methodist movement, and any study of John Wesley’s theology that omits the vast number of hymns is deficient. The collection *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* begins with an adaptation of Daniel Brevint’s work and this extract has been called “the sacramental doctrine of the Wesleys.”<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that many hymns are heavily influenced by this extract of Brevint’s work which serves as the introduction to the hymnal. Rattenbury has suggested that, “Brevint’s words were published simply because they expressed John Wesley’s opinion: nothing can be clearer than this. He abbreviated 132 pages of Brevint to thirty, and when the extract was made, it obviously was John Wesley’s rather than Brevint’s.”<sup>9</sup>

John Wesley contended against what he considered to be neglect of the sacrament, and conditions today have not changed. Rattenbury has stated that “It might be well for some who criticize Eucharistic worship to ask themselves how far their criticism is due to their dislike of or disbelief in the fact of Christ’s Atoning Sacrifice which is fundamental to deep sacramental worship and without which the Wesley’s devotion is unintelligible.”<sup>10</sup> The doctrine of the atonement and the survival of the evangelical church are inseparable. The vast collection of

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<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright. *Introduction* from *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*. (Madison, N.J.: The Charles Wesley Society, 1995), vi. This work will be abbreviated as *HLS*.

<sup>8</sup> Rattenbury. *Eucharistic*, 15.

<sup>9</sup> Rattenbury, *Eucharistic*, 94.

<sup>10</sup> Rattenbury, *Eucharistic*, 118.

the hymns of Wesley, and in particular the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, is an invaluable resource for defending and defining Methodism's theology of the atonement. Again I refer to Rattenbury who said "Theories of the Atonement find a small place in the hymns which are everywhere dominated by the fact" and that "The ultimate attitude of the Wesleys to theories of the Atonement; they decline to speculate; they fall back on experience and the Bible."<sup>11</sup> Indeed the extract of Daniel Brevint's work that serves as the introduction to this hymnal says:

That this Holy Banquet is not a bare *Memorial* only, but may actually *convey* as many blessings to me ... Indeed in what *manner* this is done, I know not; it is enough for me to admire. *One thing I know* (as said the Blind Man of our Lord) *He laid Clay upon mine Eyes and behold I see.*  
He hath blessed and given me this Bread, and my Soul received comfort.<sup>12</sup>

The place of experience is given significant standing in this collection of hymns. With regards to the doctrine of the atonement, the hymnal does not indulge in speculating on theories of the atonement, but as Rattenbury has noted the doctrine of the atonement permeates the hymnal.

In the current state of research, Teresa Berger has noted that "It is apparent that until now the soteriological emphases of the Wesleyan works have received the most attention, and rightly so. But a new and thorough study of the Eucharistic hymns might prove to be as rewarding as an analysis of the poetical texts of Wesley associated with the church year."<sup>13</sup> John and Charles Wesley produced several hymnals that follow the liturgical cycle of the Church calendar.

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<sup>11</sup> Rattenbury, *Evangelical Doctrines*, 206.

<sup>12</sup> John and Charles Wesley, *The Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice: Extracted from Dr. Brevint. Hymns on the Lord's Supper*. (Madison, N.J.: The Charles Wesley Society, 1995), 13-14. This will be abbreviated as, *Christian Sacrament, HLS*.

<sup>13</sup> Teresa Berger, *Theology in Hymns? A Study of the Relationship of Doxology and Theology According to a Collection of Hymns for the People Called Methodists* (1780). Translated by: Timothy E. Kimbrough. (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995), 90.

Their hymnals include *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord*, *Hymns for our Lord's Resurrection*, *Hymns for Ascension Day*, *Hymns for Whitsunday*, and *Hymns on the Trinity*. Oddly enough there is no hymnal for Good Friday. While some consider every Sunday a mini-Easter, the Wesleys considered every service of the Lord's Supper a mini-Good Friday. One section of *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* is devoted to "The Holy Eucharist as it implies a sacrifice" and in the introduction John writes that the spears, swords and cruel instruments of the crucifixion have all decayed, but the sacrifice of Christ continues to this very day.<sup>14</sup> The sacrifice in the Lord's Supper is not the Roman Catholic sacrifice of the mass, since hymn 63 is quick to point out that there is "No Local Deity" contained in the elements of the Lord's Supper.<sup>15</sup> The repudiation of the doctrine of transubstantiation is consistent with the Anglican Book of Common Prayer which forbids that doctrine and any reference to an altar in the church. The sacrifice during the Lord's Supper is based on:

The all-sufficiency of the one sacrifice on Calvary [which] is constantly affirmed, even while the Church's rite 'shows' it to the Father as Christ himself pleads it in heaven (hymns 116-127); by faith, our offering of praise and thanksgiving and our self-oblation are responsively 'joined' to Christ's own sacrifice, who 'bears' us into the Father's presence.<sup>16</sup>

Thus in the introduction to this hymnal, John writes, "But the sweet Smell of the Offering still remains, the Blood is still warm, the Wounds still fresh, and *the Lamb still standing as slain.*"<sup>17</sup> The risen Christ, therefore, continues to suffer and the hymns will make full use of this theological concept. Atonement fills the

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<sup>14</sup> Wesley, *Christian Sacrament*, HLS, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Wesley, HLS, 47.

<sup>16</sup> Wainwright, *Introduction*, HLS, vii,

<sup>17</sup> Wesley, *Christian Sacrament*, HLS, 8.

hymnal devoted to the Lord's Supper because the Wesley brothers understood this sacrament's connection with the event of Good Friday. To follow Teresa Berger's suggestion of studying the Eucharistic hymns in order to discover the doctrine of the atonement is a critical component to understanding Wesleyan theology.

Oddly enough, it is only as recently as 1994 that a Wesley scholar wrote what he considered to be one of the first systematic theologies of John Wesley. In his introduction Thomas Oden argued that Wesley has largely been ignored as a theologian.<sup>18</sup> This recent systematic theology (something never provided by Wesley) treats the topic of Communion only as a sub-section of Christology, and in total only a page and a half are devoted to Communion (185-186). 'Communion' or the 'Lord's Supper' is briefly mentioned on two other pages (90, 284). The fact that Communion does not stand as an independent subject in this work indicates that a systematic theology of John Wesley's view of Communion still remains to be written. This thesis will explore the imagery and vocabulary of the atonement as presented in the collection *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*. After a brief commentary on the historical context and a discussion on the nature of the sacrifice, the imagery will be presented in the following chapters: bread, wine, sacrifice, priest, victim, altar, lamb, blood, smoke and fire. The vocabulary of the atonement found in this hymnal will be presented in the next section with chapters relating to: covenant, purchase and ransom. The final sections consider the Eucharistic theology as presented in the correspondence and the sermons.

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity*. (Michigan: Zondervan, 1994), 20.

## **1) Historical Context**

The popularity of the Eucharistic hymnal is somewhat surprising when one considers that rural churches in England celebrated the Lord's Supper three or four times a year, while most towns had Communion once a month.<sup>19</sup> The devout understood the celebration of Communion limited to three or four times a year to be frequent enough,<sup>20</sup> and so it is rather shocking when one considers the fact that in his ninety years of life, John Wesley celebrated the Lord's Supper on average once every four days.<sup>21</sup> During the last 10 years of his life, John Wesley served the Lord's Supper to 19 300 communicants in 17 different cities.<sup>22</sup> He ordained men not to frustrate the Anglican Church (since he always remained loyal to the Mother Church), but because he thought "...Methodists should not remain sacramental orphans in America and in some parts of Britain."<sup>23</sup>

The Lord's Supper is also frequently mentioned throughout his writings. A survey of the works of John Wesley produced a list of the various means of grace, and in sixty-eight examples where two or more of the means of grace are listed, the Lord's Supper is second surpassed only by prayer. The Lord's Supper is listed more often than fasting, fellowship and even the reading of Scripture.<sup>24</sup> As a result, "The early Methodists flocked to the celebration of Holy Communion in such numbers that the clergy were really embarrassed with the multitude of

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<sup>19</sup> Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*. (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), 19.

<sup>20</sup> Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 403.

<sup>21</sup> J. Robert Nelson, "Methodist Eucharistic Usage," *JES* vol. 13 no 2, (Spring 1976): 279.

<sup>22</sup> Dean G. Blevins, "The Trinity and the Means of Grace" *Wesley Theological Journal* 36 no 1, (Spr. 2001): 238.

<sup>23</sup> Nelson, "Eucharistic Usage," 280.

<sup>24</sup> Ole E. Borgen. *John Wesley on the Sacraments*. (Michigan: Francis Asbury Press, 1972), 106.

communicants with which they had to deal.”<sup>25</sup> This seemingly excessive celebration of the Lord’s Supper was not an anomaly of John Wesley since “Luther, Calvin, and the English Reformers sought to make the Holy Communion a regular part of Sunday worship, but the parishioners were not ready, and so the staple fare for Protestants became scriptures, sermon, prayers, and psalmody.”<sup>26</sup> This frequent celebration of the Lord’s Supper can be traced even further back in Church history. John Wesley’s apologetic for frequent communion is based on tradition where the practices of the early church celebrated the Lord’s Supper weekly.

In his sermon “The Duty of Constant Communion,” John Wesley refers to “Canon II of the Dedication Council of Antioch (*‘in Encaeniis,’ A.D. 341*)” as an example of the early Church celebrating Communion at least four times a week. From this canon Wesley quotes, “If any believer join in the prayers of the faithful, and go away without receiving the Lord’s Supper, let him be excommunicated, as bringing confusion into the church of God.”<sup>27</sup> John Wesley uses this quotation because he considered the neglect of Communion to be inexcusable, as he explains in his sermon: “Considering this as a command of God, he that does not communicate as often as he can has no piety; considering it as a mercy, he that does not communicate as often as he can has no wisdom.”<sup>28</sup> The celebration of frequent Communion was preached by John Wesley and written by Charles in 166

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<sup>25</sup> Rattenbury, The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley. (London: Epworth Press, 1948), 4.

<sup>26</sup> Wainwright, *Introduction, HLS*, v.

<sup>27</sup> Wesley, John. *The Works of John Wesley*, vol 3, ed. Albert Outler. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 430.

<sup>28</sup> JWW vol 3, 432.

hymns in the collection: *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*. The Eucharistic hymnal consistently emphasizes the importance of the Lord's Supper and also strongly cautions against neglecting the sacrament.

The conclusion to the Eucharistic hymnal is a near epic hymn of twenty-two stanzas. That hymn begins: “Happy the Saints of former Days / Who first continued in the Word.”<sup>29</sup> The second stanza is a slight echo of Acts 2:42 which compares the devotion of the early church to the apostle’s teaching, fellowship, prayer and the breaking of bread:

In holy Fellowship they liv’d,  
Nor would from the Commandment move,  
But every joyful Day receiv’d  
The Tokens of expiring Love.<sup>30</sup>

The “Commandment” in line two is what John refers to in his sermon, *The Duty of Constant Communion*: “The first reason why it is the duty of every Christian [to receive the Lord’s Supper as often as he can] is because it is a plain command of Christ”<sup>31</sup>. This hymn begins with the example of the Lord’s Supper being celebrated on a daily basis in the early church. Stanza 4 line 2 uses powerful imagery in describing the early community of believers:

From House to House they broke the Bread  
Impregnated with Life divine,  
And drank the Spirit of their Head  
Transmitted in the sacred Wine.<sup>32</sup>

The early community of believers is described as being impregnated with the life of God. They are so blessed because they *daily* celebrated communion in the

<sup>29</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 139.

<sup>30</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 139

<sup>31</sup> WJW, vol 3. 428.

<sup>32</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 139.

breaking of bread and in drinking sacred wine. Notice here that the sacred wine is in fact a means of receiving the Spirit of their Head. The blessings of God are “transmitted” through the elements of the Lord’s Supper. A similar sentiment is found in stanza 5 lines 3 and 4, “They kept the Eucharistick Feast, / And supp’d in *Eden* with their Lord.”<sup>33</sup> Clearly the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is seen as a form of “Paradise Regained” or the return to Eden. Stanza 5 says that these Christians were “superior to the Sons of Men” because they soared and walked with God. This is followed by the lines “They liv’d on Earth like those above, / Glad Rivals of the heavenly Choir.”<sup>34</sup> The early church, on account of its daily celebration of the Lord’s Supper, is considered to be a true community of saints who stood next to the heavenly angels in terms of their virtue. Stanza 6 said that, “Their Virtue was this heavenly Food.”<sup>35</sup> It must be understood that the early church is not considered saintly due to their moral superiority. Moral achievement is worthless in the economy of God’s grace where faith in Christ and sanctification by the power of the Holy Spirit is what qualifies an individual for the glory of Heaven. The virtue of the early church is not their moral superiority but rather the term is drawing on the Latin terminology of *vires*. The virtue of the early church is expressed by the Latin terminology meaning force, power and strength and not moral achievement. The power or virtue of the early church is the ‘heavenly Food’ of the Lord’s Supper. This concluding hymn to the Eucharistic hymnal illustrates how this collection functions as an apologetic for the conception of the Lord’s Supper as the glory of the early church and the

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<sup>33</sup> Welsey, *HLS*, 139.

<sup>34</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 139.

<sup>35</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 139.

ingredient to their holiness. The corollary to this is that if the present church (whether it be the church of Wesley's era or the church of today) truly desires holiness and revival, the means is through Holy Communion and not through moral achievement. This argument is developed as the hymn continues in the following stanzas.

Stanza 10 marks a significant shift in the hymn as the focus is turned away from the early Church to a critique of the Church of the eighteenth century. This stanza asks:

Where is the pure primeval Flame,  
Which in their faithful Bosom glow'd?  
Where are the Followers of the Lamb,  
The dying Witnesses for God?<sup>36</sup>

Stanza 11 goes on to ask, “Why is the faithful seed decreased? / The Life of God extinct and dead?”<sup>37</sup> The primeval flame which once empowered the early church is now gone. The followers of the Lamb, the martyrs and the faithful seed have all decreased. The lament of these stanzas even claims that the life of God is extinct and dead in the Church. The explanation for this sad decrease, not surprisingly, is because the church has neglected the Lord’s Supper, as recorded in stanza 12: “Grown cold we cast the Means away / And quench’d our latest Spark of Love.”<sup>38</sup> Even worse, “Thine holy Ordinance contemn’d / Hath let the Flood of Evil in.”<sup>39</sup> It would not be an exaggeration to paraphrase these lines as claiming that the neglect of the Lord’s Supper is the root of all evil. Not all is lost, however, and the hope is found in the prayer contained in stanza 15 that asks

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<sup>36</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 140.

<sup>37</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 140.

<sup>38</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 140.

<sup>39</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 140.

God to revive His work and stanza 16 is the petition that God would “restore the daily Sacrifice.”<sup>40</sup> This concluding hymn functions as a summary for the hymnal as whole by describing the sacrament as the catalyst for revival. The solution to spiritual decay was through the work of God found in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper is believed to be a catalyst for revival, and the Eucharistic hymnal saw nine editions (the second widest circulation of all their hymnals) during the lifetime of John Wesley. The theology of the atonement is essential for evangelical revival and it permeates *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*.

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<sup>40</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 141.

## **2) Communion as Sacrifice**

Before studying the imagery and vocabulary found in the collection *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* pertaining to the doctrine of the atonement, one must clarify the Wesleyan understanding of Communion as a sacrifice. As stated above, the hymnal is explicitly clear that there is “no local Deity” contained in the elements. This pronouncement distances their theology from the Roman Catholic theology of transubstantiation and a repeated sacrifice. The Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation is challenged in John Wesley’s open letters and in ‘*A Roman Catechism, Faithfully drawn out of the Allowed Writings of the Church of Rome. With a Reply Thereto.*’ Wesley’s argument against this doctrine covers three points. The first argument against this position is a reference to Cardinal Cajetan who acknowledges that it is not said in the Gospel that the bread is changed into the body of Christ, but that it all rests on the authority of the Church. His second point is that the bread is called bread, even after consecration. Here he references 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapter 10 verse 17, and chapter 11 verses 26-28, to explain that what is referred to as the body of Christ is also called bread at the same time. The third point draws on Biblical examples. He refers to circumcision as the covenant, and the preparation of the lamb as the passover. Both examples illustrate a spiritual reality “...by signification and by representation, by type and figure.”<sup>41</sup> John then quotes from the “Fathers” of Christian antiquity to say that they referred to the elements as the ‘images,’ ‘symbols,’ and ‘figure’ of Christ’s body and blood.

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<sup>41</sup> John Wesley, “A Roman Catechism” n.p., *The Works of John Wesley: The Jackson Edition, vol 10. Letters and Essays, on CD-ROM.* Abingdon Press, 2005.

There is also an appeal to the senses in his effort to refute the doctrine of transubstantiation. The argument begins with a quotation from Luke 24 verse 39 where Jesus invites his disciples to touch his resurrected body. The implication is that if one uses philosophical categories of substance and accident to claim that Christ is present bodily in the sacrament, the certainty of senses is denied. Therefore, “Take away the certainty of sense, and there is no discerning a body from a spirit; and grant substantiation, and we take away the certainty of sense.”<sup>42</sup>

In a similar letter, *Popery Calmly Considered*, similar arguments are presented. In his critique of transubstantiation John Wesley refers to Scripture, antiquity, sense and reason and then says, “Such nonsense, absurdity, and self-contradiction all over is the doctrine of transubstantiation.”<sup>43</sup>

The reason for such a strong condemnation against a doctrine of transubstantiation is due to the implication of the Lord’s Supper as a sacrifice. Is the body and blood of Christ broken and shed during the service of the Lord’s Supper? The Roman Catholic answer, according to the catechism John Wesley is using, is no because Christ is impassible. This means that even when divided, Christ remains whole. Wesley’s reply is that this is a logical contradiction:

If every particle of the host is as much the whole body of Christ, as the whole host is before it be divided, then a whole may be divided into wholes; for, divide it and subdivide it, it is still whole. Whole it is before the division, whole it is in the division, and whole it is after it. Thus unreasonable, as well as false, is the doctrine of transubstantiation.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> John Wesley, “A Roman Catechism” n.p., *The Works of John Wesley: The Jackson Edition, vol 10. Letters and Essays, on CD-ROM*. Abingdon Press, 2005.

<sup>43</sup> John Wesley, “Popery Calmly Considered” n.p., *The Works of John Wesley: The Jackson Edition, vol 10. Letters and Essays, on CD-ROM*. Abingdon Press, 2005.

<sup>44</sup> John Wesley, “A Roman Catechism” n.p., *The Works of John Wesley: The Jackson Edition, vol 10. Letters and Essays, on CD-ROM*. Abingdon Press, 2005.

Once again Wesley does not hesitate to denounce unambiguously the doctrine of transubstantiation as being both unreasonable and false. Even though the doctrine of transubstantiation does not imply that Christ is divided, it still speaks to a theology of a sacrifice, the sacrifice of the mass. The catechism Wesley uses states that the sacrifice of the mass is an unbloody sacrifice identical to the sacrifice made on the cross. The reply is as follows:

The Scripture when it extols the perfection and infinite value of Christ's sacrifice, doth infer from it, that there needed not therefore any repetition of it: 'He needeth not daily, as those High Priests, to offer up sacrifice, &c.; for this he did once, when he offered up himself.' (Hebrews vii. 27.) But if the same Christ is offered in the mass as was on the cross, and that unbloody sacrifice is alike propitiatory as the bloody, there is then a repetition of the same sacrifice, and he is daily offered. And what is it to say, the one was bloody and the other is unbloody, when the unbloody is of the same virtue, and is applied to the same end, as the bloody? So that, as, if Christ had again been bloodily offered up, there had been a repetition of that sacrifice; so there is a repetition of it when he is offered up unbloodily. To have then a perfect sacrifice daily repeated, and a sacrifice without suffering, and a propitiation and remission without blood, are alike irreconcilable to the Apostle. (Hebrews ix. 22, 25, &c.)<sup>45</sup>

The argument presented in the above quotation is more than simply claiming the doctrine of a repeated sacrifice in the Lord's Supper is unbiblical. The repeated sacrifice and the doctrine of transubstantiation is considered a serious theological threat that undermines the significance of the atonement. If the unbloody sacrifice is alike propitiatory as the bloody, the logical conclusion is that the original sacrifice of Christ on the cross is insufficient to atone for the sins of humanity. Hebrews 9 verse 22 says that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins, therefore the claim is that, 'a propitiation and remission without blood, are alike irreconcilable to the Apostle.'

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<sup>45</sup> John Wesley, "A Roman Catechism" n.p., *The Works of John Wesley: The Jackson Edition, vol 10. Letters and Essays, on CD-ROM.* Abingdon Press, 2005.

Wesley clearly avoids a doctrine of transubstantiation, and yet the opposite extreme is also avoided. Their theology of Communion does not consider the sacrament to be a repeated sacrifice, and they also do not consider it a bare memorial or an empty ritual; in fact the concluding hymn contained the petition that God would “restore the daily Sacrifice.” How then is the Lord’s Supper understood to be a sacrifice, and one that occurs daily? In the introductory extract from Daniel Brevint, John Wesley writes:

The Sacrifice of Christ being appointed by the Father for a Propitiation that should continue to all Ages; and with all being everlasting by the Privilege of its own *Order*, which is *an unchangeable Priesthood*, and by his Worth who offer’d it, that is, the blessed Son of God, and by the Power of the *Eternal Spirit*, thro’ whom it was offer’d: It must in all Respects stand Eternal, the same yesterday, to-day and for ever.<sup>46</sup>

This quote introduces a theme that is central to their understanding of Communion and atonement. The sacrifice of Christ is considered a propitiation that continues through all ages for eternity. Later in the introduction this line is found: “As for the Atonement of Sin, ’tis sure the Sacrifice of Christ alone was sufficient for it: And that this great Sacrifice, being both of an infinite Value, to satisfy the most severe Justice, and of an infinite Virtue, to produce all its Effects at once, need never more be repeated.”<sup>47</sup> The Sacrifice of Christ is sufficient alone to satisfy fully the most severe Justice and therefore it is never repeated. The illustration that follows is of Moses striking the rock in the wilderness, and the second blow that came from a “faithless mistrust.” It is considered a far greater offence to question the worth of the sacrifice of Christ and therefore any repetition of the event would be “utterly superfluous” and even blasphemous.

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<sup>46</sup> Wesley, *Christian Sacrament, HLS*, 6-7.

<sup>47</sup> Wesley, *Christian Sacrament, HLS*, 21.

This sufficiently demonstrates that whenever Communion is described as a sacrifice it is not a repetition of Calvary; however, this does not yet answer the question of how Communion is understood as a sacrifice.

The introduction continues to describe Communion as that “Devout and Thankful Commemoration” with terms far stronger than an empty recollection of past events. Whether in the introduction or in the hymnal itself, consistency is found on two points: “1. That the *Sacrifice* in itself, can never be repeated; 2. That nevertheless, this Sacrament, by our Remembrance, becomes a kind of *Sacrifice*, whereby we present before God the Father, that precious Oblation of his Son once offered.”<sup>48</sup> Communion is therefore a “reminder” to God (not a reminder for the people!) of the sacrifice of Christ from long ago. Again this is not an empty exercise for God where the “remembering” is confined to the realm of ideation. The sacrifice expressed in the Lord’s Supper is a present reality based on the historical sacrifice that continues through the ascension of Christ as the slain-lamb from the book of Revelation. This is clearly stated in hymn 122 which says, “Still before thy Righteous Throne / Stands the Lamb as newly slain.”<sup>49</sup> Communion is a sacrifice that is based on the one historical sacrifice and continues throughout all time in the Person of slain Lamb.

The second hymn in this collection begins, “In this expressive Bread I see” and what is witnessed during Communion through the eyes of faith is in fact a crucifixion. There is contained in this hymn the man cut down, beaten, bruised,

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<sup>48</sup> Welsey, *Christian Sacrament*, HLS, 21.

<sup>49</sup> Wesley, HLS, 103.

and suffering from heavy blows.<sup>50</sup> Stanza 3 refers to the Spotless Lamb and this serves as the connection between Communion and sacrifice. Through the eyes of faith during the Lord’s Supper one witnesses the reality of the crucified Lamb who was once slain. The consideration of the imagery of Bread as it relates to the doctrine of the atonement will be considered later.

The sacrifice of Christ was a one time event, never to be repeated, and functions as an event that continues into the present and future. This is evident in hymn 3 stanza 1 that says through Communion, “Discern we the sacred Sign / The Body of the Lord.”<sup>51</sup> It is not the body of Christ in general, but the body of the crucified Christ in particular that is discerned. The next stanza develops this thought. The cruel instruments of crucifixion have all decayed, just as the introduction explained, but we can find “*the Lamb still standing as slain.*” Thus in stanza 2 of hymn 3 we read:

The Instruments that bruis’d Him so  
Were broke and scatter’d long ago,  
The Flames extinguished were,  
But Jesu’s Death is ever New,  
He whom in Ages past they slew  
Doth still as slain appear.<sup>52</sup>

It is important to note that Communion presents the sacrifice of the Lamb slain, and not the sacrifice of a lamb (or the Lamb) *being* slain. Hymn 5 stanza 1 describes Christ as an “eternal Victim slain” and stanza 2 of this hymn refers to Him as “the ever slaughtered Lamb.”<sup>53</sup> In other words, the atonement has been accomplished, the demands of divine justice are satisfied, and no other work is

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<sup>50</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 2.

<sup>51</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 3.

<sup>53</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 5.

necessary to contribute to the work of salvation. Hymn 114 contains the very same theme:

Yet may we celebrate below,  
And daily thus thine Offering shew,  
Expos'd before thy Father's Eyes;  
In this tremendous Mystery  
Present Thee bleeding on the Tree  
Our Everlasting Sacrifice ....<sup>54</sup>

The sacrifice present during Communion is Christ's everlasting sacrifice as an eternal Victim who continues to show the effects of having been slain. This one sacrifice endures throughout all time, and is never described in terms of a repeating event. Rattenbury has an excellent summary of this understanding of Communion as a sacrifice:

Now, what do the words 'in memory of Me,' or better, 'as a memorial of Me' (*eis anamnesis*) mean? The word anamnesis primarily signifies 'calling to mind.' To call to mind a past event is obviously to exercise memory; and a custom, a monument, or a practice which calls such a past event to mind is undoubtedly the word as applied to the Sacrament always recalls the historical fact of Calvary. But Jesus did not tell His disciples to remember Calvary, but to remember Him; to remember, of course, 'Christ crucified,' but not merely the crucifixion of Christ, but Christ who was crucified. The difficulty of Brevint and Wesley was that He who had died was to them alive forever more, and while they valued immeasurably the fact of his historic death, that was by no means all that they valued. The Sacrament could never mean to them a bare memorial of the dead Christ, for the simple reason that He was living – still bearing upon His hands and feet glorious scars, but ascended into heaven, where He pleaded His cause with His Father for them. Hence, however much they commemorated the past event when they called Jesus to mind, they also re-presented more than that event. The memory of Calvary was only a part of the *anamnesis* made by Holy Communion.<sup>55</sup>

The resurrection of Christ was the resurrection of the one who had been crucified, in other words, he was raised wounded with the scars still visible. The sacrifice

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<sup>54</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 105

<sup>55</sup> Rattenbury, *Eucharistic*, 20-21.

of Communion is inseparably linked with the intercessory work of Christ where the wounds and the blood from the slain lamb continue to flow with efficacious, everlasting power.

There is an added dimension to the Wesleyan conception of the Lord's Supper as sacrifice which entails a sacrifice of ourselves that is joined with the sacrifice made by Christ. The introduction laments that, "Too many who are call'd Christians live as if under the Gospel there were no Sacrifice but that of Christ on the cross."<sup>56</sup> The next sentence acknowledges that no other sacrifice other than the one made by Christ can atone for sin, and yet the introduction argues for the mark of true discipleship being conformity to and communion with Christ. This is only accomplished through the believer joining in the sacrifice of Christ and without which the believer remains distant from God. This sanctifying work is possible through the self-sacrifice of Christ where "this Great Sacrifice sustains and sanctifies those Things, that are thrown into his Fire, hallow'd upon his Altar, and together with him consecrated to God."<sup>57</sup> Here the Lord's Supper is understood as a means of grace intended to be a catalyst for sanctification. One entire section of the hymnal is devoted to the topic of self-sacrifice, and this view finds support in the concluding hymn that praised the virtue of the early church. These "True followers of their Lamb-like Lord" shared in the suffering and sacrifice of Christ. The early church is celebrated because as "His Confessors for Him they liv'd, / For Him his faithful Martyrs dyed."<sup>58</sup> What greater self-sacrifice could there be than martyrdom? The self-sacrifice of the early church is

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<sup>56</sup> Wesley, *Christian Sacrament*, HLS, 23.

<sup>57</sup> Wesley, *Christian Sacrament*, HLS, 27.

<sup>58</sup> Wesley, HLS, 140.

considered to be a participation in the sacrifice of Christ. A similar view is found in Hymn 153 which is found in the section concerning the sacrifice of ourselves involved in the Lord's Supper. In that hymn the believer joins in the sacrifice of Christ through the following petition:

Father, our Sacrifice receive  
Our Souls and Bodies we present,  
Our Goods, and Vows, and Praises give,  
Whate'er thy bounteous Love hath lent.  
Thou can't not now our Gift despise,  
Cast on that all atoning Lamb,  
Mixt with that bleeding Sacrifice,  
And offer'd up thro' Jesu's Name.<sup>59</sup>

With this understanding of the sacrifice in Communion, it is now safe to consider the vocabulary and imagery of the atonement used to describe the doctrine of propitiation as found in the collection, *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*.

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<sup>59</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 128.

### **3) Imagery of the Atonement**

#### **a) Bread:**

The Communion elements of bread and wine are some of the imagery in the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* used to convey the theological doctrine of atonement being made through propitiation. Hymn 89 enters into the debate about what is conveyed through these elements of Communion. Is it an empty sacrament meant only to serve as a reminder and not *anamnesis*? Stanza 1 reads:

Ye Faithful Souls, who thus record  
The Passion of that Lamb Divine,  
Is the Memorial of your Lord  
An useless Form, an Empty Sign,  
Or doth He here his Life impart?  
What faith the Witness of your Heart? <sup>60</sup>

The elements of Communion, the bread and wine, are either the “useless form and empty sign” or effectual sources of grace. The question raised by this stanza is whether the memorial serves only as a record like a cold tombstone, or does it in fact impart life? The argument is that the Memorial of the Lord is the record of the passion of the Divine Lamb and therefore the bread and wine are linked to the sacrifice and passion of Christ, who is the Divine Lamb that imparts life.

Hymn 71 says that these Communion elements are “The Outward Sign of Inward Grace... The Sign transmits the Signified.”<sup>61</sup> What is signified through bread is propitiation. Leon Morris defines propitiation as “the averting of wrath by the offering of a gift.”<sup>62</sup> Hymn 10 stanza 2 lines 4 to 6 express this clearly:

Jesus thy Wrath hath pacified,

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<sup>60</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 76.

<sup>61</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 50.

<sup>62</sup> Leon Morris, *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.; Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), 211.

Jesus, thy Well-belov'd hath died  
For all Mankind t'atone.<sup>63</sup>

The wrath of God has been pacified and satisfied on account of the death of Christ, thus the atonement described in this verse is based on the propitiation of Christ which bears the wrath of God to satisfy the demands of Divine Justice. This belief is also present in the introduction: "Let us fall amazed at that Stroke of Divine Justice, that could not be satisfied but by the Death of God!"<sup>64</sup> John and Charles use the imagery of bread in the Communion hymns because bread signifies this emphasis upon the propitiation of Christ in the sacrifice he makes.

The imagery of Bread is used to illustrate the propitiatory work of Christ in the atonement in *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*. For example, in the introduction John writes, "I behold in this Bread dried up and baked with Fire, the fiery Wrath which thou didst suffer from above!"<sup>65</sup> The Bread of Communion contains not merely the body of Christ, but in particular the body of Christ that suffered under the "fiery wrath from above." Hymn 2, "In this expressive Bread I see" has already been quoted to illustrate the association of Communion and sacrifice. A closer look at that hymn reveals an understanding of propitiation contained in the imagery of bread. Stanza 2 reads:

The Bread dried up and burnt with Fire  
Presents the Father's vengeful Ire  
Which my Redeemer bore:  
Into all his Bones the Fire he sent,  
Till all the flaming Darts were spent,  
And Justice ask'd no more.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 9.

<sup>64</sup> Wesley, *Christian Sacrament, HLS*, 7.

<sup>65</sup> Wesley, *Christian Sacrament, HLS*, 7.

<sup>66</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 2.

Stanza 1 mentions that bread is prepared as wheat is cut down, and this second stanza refers to the bread burned with fire which represents the Father's wrath. That hymn concludes with the lines, "And lo! my Lord is here become / The Bread of Life to me!" Only by the propitiation of Jesus whereby the wrath of God is averted by His own sacrifice, which is described here in terms of wheat being cut down and bread being baked, can the worshipper sing that Jesus has become the Bread of Life. The bread used in the Lord's Supper has been "dried up and burnt with Fire" and this serves to illustrate "the Father's vengeful Ire." Atonement is the righteousness of God being satisfied only in the death of Christ. Thus the final line of stanza 2 joyfully proclaims, "And Justice ask'd no more."

Hymn 44 draws on themes taken from the Exodus. Bread in this hymn is used both to describe the Passover Lamb and the Manna from heaven. Stanza 1 reads:

Our Passover for us is slain,  
The Tokens of his Death remain,  
On these Authentic Signs impress:  
By Jesus out of *Egypt* led  
Still on the Pascal Lamb we feed,  
And keep the Sacramental Feast.<sup>67</sup>

The very first line of this hymn introduces a theme of substitution. The atonement of Christ was a work of God on our behalf. The tokens referred to as "Authentic Signs" are obviously the bread and wine of Communion. These authentic signs of Communion point to the Pascal Lamb in the sacramental feast. Stanza 3 refers to Christ as the "Bread sent down from Heaven" and "The Manna of thy quick'ning Love."<sup>68</sup> It must be remembered, of course, that imagery of Bread implies the wheat having been cut down, kneaded, beaten, and baked in the fire. Hymn 51

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<sup>67</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 32.

<sup>68</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 33.

illustrates this clearly. The hymn opens with the lines: “Thou very Pascal Lamb / Whose Blood for us was shed,” and concludes with the line “The Manna of thy Love.”<sup>69</sup> The first and last lines of this hymn “book-end” this hymn that draws on the Exodus imagery of the desert wanderings where Communion provides the nourishment for “fainting souls.” Here the theme of Manna is inseparably linked with the sacrificial lamb of Passover. The connection between Manna, the Passover Lamb, and Christ is a result of the typological reading of the Older Testament where various people and objects were seen to be types that foreshadowed Christ. One hymn describes the sacrificial system of the Older Testament as “Feeble Types and Shadows Old” that are all fulfilled in Christ.<sup>70</sup> Another example is hymn 41 that describes the sacrifice of Jesus as the “Truth of the Pascal Sacrifice.”<sup>71</sup> With this hermeneutic, manna and the sacrificial lamb are seen to be figures representative of Christ.

Another example where the imagery of bread is used in the collection *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* to convey the theological understanding of the atonement is hymn 126. Stanza 5 makes this point clearly:

The Lamb as crucified afresh  
Is here held out to Men,  
The Tokens of his Blood and Flesh  
Are on this Table Seen.<sup>72</sup>

The bread of Communion is a token of the body of Christ who is considered to be freshly crucified. The theological understanding of sacrifice as presented in this hymnal is revealed through the use of the imagery of bread. Bread serves as a

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<sup>69</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 37.

<sup>70</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 104.

<sup>71</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 30.

<sup>72</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 107.

signifier for the body of Christ, and his death and sacrifice is one of oblation where the atonement is made possible through the propitiation. At the Lord's Table one can, through the eyes of faith, visibly perceive the crucified Lamb in the bread.

Hymn 54 compares the various means of grace where prayer, fasting and Scripture are all acknowledge as means that convey life when mixed with faith. The first stanza ends with the lines, "But chiefly here my Soul is fed / With fullness of Immortal Bread."<sup>73</sup> The description of the bread of Communion as the "Immortal Bread" is found here and also in hymn 57. This Immortal Bread is the first choice of the Wesley's for the feeding of one's soul. The concluding stanza to this hymn deals with the imagery of wine in a specific reference to the atonement.

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<sup>73</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 39.

### **b) Wine**

Taking a stand against a Roman Catholic doctrine, Wesley deplores the withholding of the wine from the laity. In his open letter, *Popery Calmly Considered*, Wesley writes that there is no justification for this practice:

An evil practice attending this evil doctrine is, the depriving the laity of the cup in the Lord's supper. It is acknowledged by all, that our Lord instituted and delivered this sacrament in both kinds; giving the wine as well as the bread to all that partook of it; and that it continued to be so delivered in the Church of Rome for above a thousand years. And yet, notwithstanding this, the Church or Rome now forbids the people to drink the cup! A more insolent and barefaced corruption cannot easily be conceived!<sup>74</sup>

It is a command of Christ that both the bread and wine be received and this practice has the support of a thousand years of Christian tradition. Both John and Charles Wesley are thoroughly Protestant, and therefore the wine is not withheld from the communicants.

The references to wine in the hymnal are similar to the examples where Bread is used to convey an understanding of atonement. Like the Bread, the Wine is also referred to as the “Immortal Wine” in hymn 34.<sup>75</sup> Hymn 54 concludes with a reference to the wine and its association with the atonement:

Communion closer far I feel  
And deeper drink th' Atoning Blood,  
The Joy is more unspeakable,  
And yields me larger Draughts of God,  
'Till Nature faints beneath the Power,  
And Faith fill'd up can hold no more.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> John Wesley, “Popery Calmly Considered” n.p., *The Works of John Wesley: The Jackson Edition, vol 10. Letters and Essays, on CD-ROM*. Abingdon Press, 2005.

<sup>75</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 26.

<sup>76</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 39

Although not mentioned specifically, the drink of Communion is the wine. The image of wine here is the outward sign that signifies the inward grace of the “Atoning Blood.” Just as the production of Bread implied the propitiation of Christ’s sacrifice, the use of the image of wine and the manner of its production will also be seen to imply the sacrifice of Christ.

Hymn number 17 is reminiscent of “Come O Thou Traveller Unknown” where the first stanza asks for the identity of a stranger. This stranger comes “Clad in Garments dipt in Blood!” This is the song of the “Strong triumphant Traveller, / Is he Man, or is he God?” The hymn is structured as a call and answer, and the answer to this question is given in stanza 2:

I that speak in Righteousness,  
Son of God and Man I am,  
Mighty to redeem your Race;  
Jesus is your Saviour’s Name.<sup>77</sup>

The stranger is none other than Jesus who acts to Redeem humanity. Having settled that question, stanza 3 introduces a new question:

Wherefore are thy Garments red,  
Died as in a crimson Sea?  
They that in the Wine-fat tread  
Are not stained so much as Thee.<sup>78</sup>

Those who work in the winepress are not as darkly stained red as Jesus. In case one missed the reference to the garments dipped in blood from stanza 1, this verse continues the questioning. The identity of the stranger is now known, but why are the garments so red? Stanza 4 provides the answer:

I the Father’s fav’rite Son,  
Have the dreadful Wine-press trod,

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<sup>77</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 13.

<sup>78</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 13.

Borne the vengeful Wrath alone,  
All the fiercest Wrath of God.<sup>79</sup>

This stanza is a clear description and definition of propitiation. Propitiation is the absorption of the wrath of God (a divine initiative) and averting it away from sinful humanity. Jesus, the favourite Son of the Father, trod the dreadful winepress and in so doing he alone bore the vengeful and fiercest wrath of God. The winepress is a Biblical theme taken out of Isaiah 63 and the book of Revelation. As this verse plainly states, the winepress is the place where God pours out His fiercest and most vengeful wrath. Hymn 21 says that “Jesus drinks the bitter Cup; / The Wine-press treads alone.”<sup>80</sup> The wine of Communion is understood to be the fruit of that wine-press of God’s wrath experienced by Christ alone. Bread conveyed the theme of propitiation in terms of how bread is produced, and likewise the imagery of wine functions as an illustration of Christ suffering and being crushed under the wrath of God. Hymn 61 does not hesitate to link the wine of Communion with the blood of Christ. Here in this hymn it is referred to “hallow’d Wine” that cheers the communicant. Furthermore it is:

(Communion of thy Flesh and Blood)  
We banquet on Immortal Food,  
And drink the Streams of Love Divine.<sup>81</sup>

The streams of Love Divine are a reference to the blood that flows from the sacrificed Lamb. Hymn 115 refers once again to the hallowed Bread and Wine that “Presents his Bleeding Sacrifice.”<sup>82</sup> Unless anyone should mistakenly suppose that the sacrifice is a repeated offering, the following stanza reaffirms the

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<sup>79</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 14.

<sup>80</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 16.

<sup>81</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 45.

<sup>82</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 97.

sacrifice is restricted to the intercession of the everlasting slain-Lamb who suffered once:

Glory to God who reigns above,  
But suffer'd once for Man below,  
With Joy we celebrate His Love,  
And thus his precious Passion shew,  
Till in the Clouds our Lord we see,  
And shout with all his Saints ---- 'TIS HE!

The Communion chalice is filled with streams of Love Divine that signify the blood of Christ was shed once and yet it continually conveys grace. The doctrine of propitiation is the absorption of the wrath of God (a divine initiative) and averting it away from sinful humanity; the heavenly banquet of Immortal Food is the blood of Christ present in the wine of Communion. Therefore the Wine described in these Communion hymns is an image that carries the meaning of propitiation.

Hymn 126 refers to this everlasting sacrifice through a reference to the elements of Communion. The first verse refers to Communion as a great instrument to reach the eternal Sacrifice. Then stanza 2 says:

The Lamb as crucified afresh  
Is here held out to Men,  
The Tokens of his Blood and Flesh  
Are on this Table Seen.<sup>83</sup>

The Communion Wine is a token or sign of the Blood of Christ; blood which comes from the Lamb as if it were recently crucified. This is not to suggest that the sacrifice is repeated, but rather that the one sacrifice has an inherent power that renders it forever efficacious. This is consistent with the introduction that

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<sup>83</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 107.

states that any other sacrifice would lose its strength over time. Hymn 128 contains yet another reference to the wine-press. This hymn begins:

All hail, Thou mighty to atone!  
 To expiate Sin is thine alone,  
 Thou hast alone the Wine-press trod,  
 Thou only hast for Sinners died,  
 By one Oblation satisfied  
 Th'Inexorably righteous God . . . .<sup>84</sup>

That verse goes on to say that if the entire Church were engulfed in flames and offered up to God as one sacrifice, they could not share in Christ's honour or pay the sinner's smallest debt. Not only would the entire Church engulfed in flames fail to pay the sinner's smallest debt, stanza 1 lines 10-12 state:

They could not, Lord, thine Honour share,  
 With Thee the Father's Justice bear,  
 Or bear one single Sin away.<sup>85</sup>

The issue here is how will the Father's justice be satisfied by sins being born away? The bearing away of sin is expiation, and line 2 mentioned that to expiate sin belongs to Christ alone. Expiation occurs in the sacrifice of Christ when the sin that condemned sinful humanity is placed on Christ and borne away by his death. This is reflected in Scripture passages such as 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:21 that say, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us." The satisfaction of divine justice is propitiation. Propitiation is a divine initiative where the wrath of God is absorbed and therefore it is averted away from sinful humanity. The sins that are expiated and the divine justice satisfied in propitiation fulfill the requirements necessary to make atonement possible. *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* makes frequent use of imagery of bread and wine because they convey the theology of

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<sup>84</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 109.

<sup>85</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 109.

atonement as expressed through expiation and propitiation. The demands of the divine justice of the “inexorably righteous God” are satisfied through propitiation and through sins being expiated. This is illustrated through the imagery of the wine-press.

The result is, as stanza 2 begins, “Thy Self our utmost Price hast paid, / Thou hast for all Atonement made.” Atonement is made only through the propitiation of Christ as he expiates sin away on behalf of humanity. In a similar manner to the Bread, the imagery of the Wine is used to convey the sense of wonder at the Divine Love. Both bread and wine illustrate the initiative of Christ in experiencing the full extent of the wrath of God. Wine is produced through the grapes being crushed in the wine-press, and that imagery and Biblical vocabulary contained in these hymns is used to describe the atonement.

Hymn 57 is an exploration of the mystery with respect to the Bread and Wine of Communion. The first stanza begins:

O Thou Depth of Love Divine  
 Th’Unfathomabe Grace?  
 Who shall say how Bread and Wine  
 God into Man conveys?  
*How* the Bread his Flesh imparts,  
*How* the Wine transmits his Blood,  
 Fills his Faithful Peoples Hearts  
 With all the Life of God.<sup>86</sup>

The question here is how the elements of Communion convey the substance they signify. There is no question here as to whether or not they do convey grace. There is no question that the bread imparts the body of Christ and wine transmits his blood. Bread is the wheat cut down, kneaded, beaten, and finally baked in

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<sup>86</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 41.

fire. Wine is the fruit crushed in the wine-press. Both images convey the doctrine atonement through describing the aspect of propitiation. The next stanza does not even begin to make a suggestion as to how these means convey the grace they signify:

Let the wisest Mortal shew  
How we the Grace receive:  
Feeble Elements bestow  
A Power not theirs to give:  
Who explains the Wondrous Way?  
How thro' these the Virtue came?  
These the Virtue did convey,  
Yet still remain the same.<sup>87</sup>

The “virtue” of the elements remains the same, in other words, there is no transformation of the elements; nevertheless, this is not an empty sacrament. The elements of Communion do indeed convey a virtue that is a power not naturally theirs to give. With perhaps a trace of sarcasm, the task of describing how we receive grace through Communion is left to the wisest mortal. This task would be impossible, and stanza 3 presses this point further claiming that any such attempt is certain to fail:

How can heavenly Spirits rise  
By earthly Matter fed,  
Drink herewith Divine Supplys  
And eat immortal Bread?  
Ask the Father's Wisdom *how*;  
Him that did the Means ordain  
Angels round our Altars bow  
To search it out, in vain.<sup>88</sup>

The wisest mortal would only join the angels in a vain search for an explanation as to how the means convey the grace they signify. In this verse there is yet

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<sup>87</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 41.

<sup>88</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 41.

another reference to the Bread and the Drink of Communion. Stanza 4 is the conclusion with regards to the Bread and Wine of Communion:

Sure and real is the Grace,  
The Manner be unknown,  
Only meet us in thy Ways  
And perfect us in One,  
Let us taste the heavenly Powers,  
Lord, we ask for Nothing more;  
Thine to bless, 'Tis only Ours  
To wonder, and adore.<sup>89</sup>

The grace of Communion is reaffirmed as being sure and real. There is yet another reference in this stanza, line 4, to the Lord's Supper as a means of grace which sanctifies and perfects. The question is never concerned with whether or not grace is received. The point is, the manner that this is done remains a mystery but this does not matter since the petition is that God would meet his people in His own appointed ways. The Bread and Wine of Communion are a taste of heavenly power, and it is the task of the communicant to simply "wonder and adore."

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<sup>89</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 41.

### **c) Sacrifice**

It has already been discussed above how John and Charles Wesley understood the Eucharistic meal to be a sacrifice. The imagery of sacrifice is frequently used in *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, and as was discussed earlier concerning their use of the imagery of bread and wine, the use of sacrificial imagery conveys a theology of atonement. The introduction to the hymnal makes it clear that while the sacrifice of Christ is never repeated, nevertheless the Sacrament is a sacrifice where God the Father is presented with the “precious Oblation” of the Son.<sup>90</sup> The imagery of sacrifice is presented in this collection through the imagery of a priest, victim, altar, the sacrificial Lamb, Blood, and Smoke.

Hymn 2, “In this expressive Bread I see” has already been discussed in terms of the imagery of bread. Rattenbury notes that the term “express” had different connotations in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century from what it has today. Today the verb ‘express’ is understood as a sentiment uttered in words. The adjective expressive implies that which is emphatic or precise. In the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, the definition of express was influenced by the Latin terminology of *exprimere* which means to press or force out as in the example of the image stamped on coins.<sup>91</sup> The “expressive bread” of hymn 2 contains all the detailed imagery of a crucifixion that “Are in this Emblem found.”<sup>92</sup> Hymn 23 stanza 1 lines 3-6 is an invitation to see the crucifixion through the vehicle of the sacrament:

See his Body mangled, rent,  
Cover'd with a gore of Blood!  
Sinful soul, what hast Thou done?

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<sup>90</sup> Wesley, *Christian Sacrament*, HLS, 21.

<sup>91</sup> Rattenbury, *The Hymns of Methodism*. (London: Epworth Press, 1945), 37.

<sup>92</sup> Wesley, HLS, 2.

Murther'd God's eternal Son!<sup>93</sup>

This hymn, like many in the collection, develops graphic images of the sacrifice. Stanza 2 continues to insist upon the crucifixion as a sacrifice and the concluding lines introduce the concept of a substitution:

Yes, our Sins have done the Deed,  
Drove the Nails that fix Him here,  
Crown'd with Thorns his sacred Head,  
Pierc'd Him with the Soldier's Spear,  
Made his Soul a Sacrifice;  
For a sinful World He dies.<sup>94</sup>

The sacrifice presented in the above stanza is a crucifixion on behalf of a sinful world. The sinful world is not a vague general concept but rather it is on account of particular sinful souls. Those who read or sing these lines confess that their sins drove the nails, placed the crown of thorns on Jesus' head, and pierced his side with a spear.

The following hymn, number 24, begins with a look at the cross and the sacrifice of one "expiring in the sinner's place"<sup>95</sup> and this again reiterates the concept of sacrifice and a substitutionary atonement. Hymn 64 does not hesitate to boast about the benefits of the Lord's Supper. Stanza 2 begins, "Yes, thy Sacrament extends / All the Blessings of thy Death." These blessings are all described in stanza 1:

O The Grace on Man bestow'd!  
Here my dearest Lord I see  
Offering up his Death to God,  
Giving all his Life to me:  
God for Jesu's Sake forgives

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<sup>93</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 18.

<sup>94</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 19.

<sup>95</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 19.

Man by Jesu's Spirit lives.<sup>96</sup>

The Lord's Supper is presented here as a sacrifice through the 'expressive bread' that extends the blessings of Christ's death. Note that in the above stanza there are three blessings which amount to humanity living "by Jesu's Spirit." There is the first blessing of Christ 'offering up his Death unto God,' secondly Christ 'giving all his Life to me' and finally 'God for Jesu's Sake forgives.'

Stanza 1 line 3 says that here, in this sacrament, one witnesses the offering up of Christ's death as a propitiation and an oblation given to God. The first blessing is Christ "offering up his Death to God." The significance of sacrifice and Christ offering up his death to God is also explored in the collection *Hymns for Ascension-Day*. In one hymn there is a reference to the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. In two stanzas the Gospel message is clearly proclaimed:

The Blood of Goats and Bullocks slain  
Could never purge our guilty Stain,  
Could never for our Sins atone;  
But Thou thine own most precious Blood  
Hast spilt to quench the Wrath of God,  
Hast sav'd us by thy Blood alone.

Shed on the Altar of thy Cross,  
Thy Blood to God presented was;  
Thro' the Eternal Spirit's Power:  
Thou didst a Spotless Victim, bleed,  
That We from Sin and Suffering freed  
Might live to God, and sin no more.<sup>97</sup>

The blessing of Christ offering his Death to God serves to "quench the wrath of God." This is the doctrine of propitiation where God acts of His own initiative to divert his own wrath. Atonement was made possibly only by the sacrifice of

<sup>96</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 47.

<sup>97</sup> Wesley, *Hymns for Ascension Sunday* (Madison NJ, The Charles Wesley Society, 1994), 8.

Christ where his precious blood was spilled. The blood of sacrificed animals could never fully atone for sins since the sacrifice was repeated yearly. The blood of Christ, however, is presented to God and that alone is the basis for salvation.

The second blessing is Christ “Giving all his Life to me.” In the collection *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord*, one encounters a theology of *theosis* where the life of God is manifest in the soul of humanity. One stanza in this Christmas collection states:

Made flesh for our Sake,  
That we might partake  
The Nature Divine,  
And again in his Image, his Holiness shine.<sup>98</sup>

To partake in the Divine Nature reflects a theology of theosis where the life of God is manifest in the soul of the believer through the power of the Holy Spirit.

A similar stanza reads:

In my weak sinful Flesh appear,  
O God, be manifest here,  
Peace, Righteousness, and Joy,  
Thy Kingdom Lord, set up within  
My faithful Heart, and all my Sin,  
The Devil’s Works destroy.<sup>99</sup>

Both of these stanzas from the *Nativity* hymnal expand upon the blessing of Christ giving his life to the believer, and this blessing is a restoration of the *Imago Dei*. The Kingdom of God is set up in the hearts of the believer, manifest by the fruit of the Spirit such as peace and joy, and exemplified by a godly life of

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<sup>98</sup> Wesley, *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord*, (Madison, N.J.: The Charles Wesley Society, 1991), 22.

<sup>99</sup> Wesley, *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord*, (Madison, N.J.: The Charles Wesley Society, 1991), 36.

righteousness and holiness. In the Eucharistic hymnal, to sing of the blessing where Christ gives his life to the believer, is a description of sanctification.

The third blessing, that “God for Jesu’s Sake forgives,” is not a one-time event that is completed at the cross, rather it continues through Christ’s eternal intercession. In the collection *Hymns for our Lord’s Resurrection*, God forgiving for the sake of Jesus is expressed as follows:

We have now thro’ Thee found Favour,  
Righteous in thy Father’s Sight:  
Hears He not thy Prayer unceasing?  
Can He turn away thy Face:  
Send us down the purhas’d Blessing,  
Fulness of the Gospel-Grace.<sup>100</sup>

The intercession of Christ is an unceasing prayer and God the Father responds with forgiveness. This third blessing culminates in the fullness of the Gospel expressed in the doctrine of atonement. Humanity can only find favour with God when propitiation occurs and the sins that once separated sinful humanity from a Holy God are expiated.

Hymn 159 is also clear and consistent on the description of the sacrifice of Christ as a propitiation that satisfies the righteous demands of God’s justice. That hymn describes the events of the cross as Christ’s “Bloody Oblation”<sup>101</sup> and of course the vocabulary of an ‘oblation’ by definition describes a substitutionary offering. This imagery of a sacrifice is further developed and emphasized through the usage of the terminology of a priest, victim, altar, lamb, blood and smoke, and each of these images conveys the theological doctrine of atonement.

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<sup>100</sup> Wesley, *Hymns for our Lord’s Resurrection*, (Madison NJ, The Charles Wesley Society, 1992), 14.

<sup>101</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 133.

#### **d) Priest**

Hebrews 4:14 refers to Christ as the great High Priest. With both John and Charles Wesley thoroughly saturating their work with Scripture, there are many references in this collection of hymns to Christ as the priest. Concerning this verse Wesley writes in his New Testament commentary:

*Having therefore a great high priest – Great indeed, being the eternal Son of God, that is passed through the heavens – As the Jewish high priest passed through the veil into the holy of holies, carrying with him the blood of the sacrifices, on the yearly day of atonement; so our great high priest went once for all through the visible heavens, with the virtue of his own blood, into the immediate presence of God.<sup>102</sup>*

This theology of Christ as the high priest refers to the everlasting intercession and is based on the atonement made at the cross. If the sacrifice Christ made was an act of propitiation where God acts of His own initiative, the priest offering up the sacrifice is Christ himself. As previously mentioned, the introduction to the hymnal refers to the sacrifice of Christ as being appointed by God the Father for a propitiation that continues throughout eternity. The next sentence refers to Christ as an everlasting Priest, ministering to the people by the Power of the Holy Spirit. This Trinitarian theology describes how people approach God the Father through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. The introduction describing Christ as the eternal priest then says, “It must in all Respects stand Eternal, the Same yesterday, to-day and for ever.”<sup>103</sup> Elsewhere in the introduction John writes, “And since he is gone up, he sends down to Earth the Graces that spring continually both from his everlasting Sacrifice, and from the continual Intercession that attends it.”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> John Wesley, *Wesley's Notes on the New Testament*, vol 2, np.

<sup>103</sup> *Christian Sacrament*, HLS, 7.

<sup>104</sup> *Christian Sacrament*, HLS, 15.

The imagery of sacrifice requires a priest, and Christ himself fulfills that role as he eternally intercedes on behalf of sinful humanity. In a service of the Lord's Supper it is not the minister who functions as priest as this would imply a second sacrifice or the sacrifice of the mass. Only Christ is the priest as this following quotation demonstrates:

This great and holy Mystery communicates to us, the Death of our blessed Lord, both as *offering himself to God*, and as giving himself to Man. As *He offer'd himself to God*, it enters me into that Mystical Body for which he died, and which is dead with Christ: Yea, it sets me on the very Shoulders of that Eternal Priest, while he offers up Himself and intercedes for his Spiritual Israel.<sup>105</sup>

Christ offering up himself to God as the victim of the sacrifice is the everlasting intercession and the ministry of a priest. Here Christ is presented as being simultaneously priest and victim. Again this quotation refers to Christ as the "Eternal Priest." A further example from the introduction continues to refer to Christ as an "Eternal Priest" but adds yet another adjective: "So let us ever turn our Eyes and our Hearts, toward Jesus our eternal High Priest, who is gone up into the true Sanctuary, and doth there continually present both his own Body and Blood before God ...."<sup>106</sup> These examples throughout the introduction to the hymnal refer to Christ as the eternal, high priest who serves in an everlasting ministry of intercession on behalf of the people.

The contents of the hymnal also refer to Christ as an eternal high priest. For example, hymn number 5, stanza 1 lines 4 and 5 say "Our everlasting Priest art

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<sup>105</sup> *Christian Sacrament, HLS*, 15-16.

<sup>106</sup> *Christian Sacrament, HLS*, 22.

Thou, / And plead'st thy Death for Sinners now.”<sup>107</sup> Likewise hymn 67 stanza 2 says:

Saint of the Lord, my Soul is Sin,  
Yet O Eternal Priest come in,  
And cleanse thy mean Abode,  
Convert into a Sacred Shrine,  
And count this abject Soul of mine  
A Temple meet for God.<sup>108</sup>

The ministry of Christ as the Eternal Priest is to sanctify the hearts of the believers. Similarly hymn number 118 begins with “Live our Eternal Priest.” The second stanza describes the intercession and ministry of Christ as the Eternal Priest:

He ever lives, and prays  
For all the faithful Race;  
In the Holiest Place above  
Sinners Advocate He stands,  
Pleads for us his Dying Love,  
Shews for us his bleeding Hands.<sup>109</sup>

The intercession of Christ is his service as an advocate pleading the merits of his shed blood.

The next stanza contains a reference to Aaron: “All our Names the Father knows, / Reads them on our *Aaron’s Breast*.” This is an example of Charles Wesley using the Biblical vocabulary that considers Aaron to be a typological figure for Christ. The previous hymn, number 117 uses this imagery to its fullest extent and makes yet another reference to the names written on Aaron’s breast. Stanza one refers to “Aaron’s ephod,” a Biblical allusion to Exodus 28 where

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<sup>107</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 5.

<sup>108</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 49.

<sup>109</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 100.

Aaron's ephod is described as having stones engraved with the names of the sons of Israel. The stanza therefore reads:

Thy Death exalts thy ransom'd Ones,  
And sets us 'midst the precious Stones,  
Closest thy dear thy loving Breast,  
*Israel* as on thy Shoulders stands;  
Our Names are graven on the Hands  
The Heart of our Eternal Priest.<sup>110</sup>

With the previous stanza mentioning Aaron's ephod, and the petition to be set "midst the precious Stones," the typology of Aaron is applied to Christ as the eternal high priest. It is no longer the names of the sons of Israel, but "Our Names" are graven on the hands of Christ. It is important to remember that hymn 118, and others, refer to the wounds of Christ as still bleeding. That the wounds are still bleeding is significant because they indicate the effect and effectiveness of the cross is everlasting. Christ did not simply suffer the agony of the cross to make atonement, and then resurrect in a new body leaving the wounds of the cross behind. The resurrected body of Christ bears the scars from the cross and the description of the bleeding wounds in heaven describe a sacrifice once made that continues throughout eternity. The above stanza states that our names are engraved on the hands of Christ and written in blood that comes from these bleeding wounds. The following stanza describes the everlasting intercession of Christ as high priest:

For us He ever intercedes,  
His Heaven-deserving Passion pleads  
Presenting us before the Throne;  
We want no Sacrifice beside,  
By that great Offering Sanctified,  
One with our Head, forever One.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 99.

It is the role of the high priest to present the sacrifice on behalf of the people before the Holy God. Christ himself makes the necessary sacrifice and presents himself as simultaneously priest and the sacrificed victim to God the Father.

Hebrews chapter seven compares Jesus with Melchizedek and includes a reference to a Psalm that speaks of one being appointed “a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” Hymn 46 contains a reference to Melchizedek. This particular hymn refers to Christ both as a priest in the order of Aaron and also that of Melchizedek:

*Aaron* for us the Blood hath shed,  
*Melchisedec* bestows the Bread,  
 To nourish this, and that t’ atone;  
 And both the Priests in Christ are One.<sup>112</sup>

The next stanza says that Jesus himself appears to sacrifice and supplies his own flesh and blood. All of this priestly language refers to a sacrifice made for the atonement of sins. Propitiation begins with God’s own initiative in providing atonement through a sacrifice. Christ himself makes the sacrifice and serves as an everlasting high priest.

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<sup>111</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 99.

<sup>112</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 34.

### e) Victim

Any sacrifice made by a priest presupposes the presence of a victim. In the theology presented in the Eucharistic hymnal, Jesus Christ is simultaneously priest and victim. This paradox also appears in the major 1780 collection of hymns. Hymn number 186 from the collection *Hymns for the People Called Methodists*, has a stanza with a reference to Christ as simultaneously priest and victim:

On thee my Priest I call,  
Thy blood atoned for all:  
Still the Lamb as slain appears,  
Still thou stand'st before the throne,  
Ever off'ring up my prayers,  
These presenting with thy own.<sup>113</sup>

Line one clearly refers to Christ as the Priest, and line two of this stanza refers to the blood of the atonement. A priest with sacrificial blood for atonement requires a victim, and in this case line three refers to the slain Lamb. Lines four and five refer to the intercession of Christ, and this intercession occurs as Christ fulfills the roles both as priest and victim simultaneously. In the Eucharistic hymnal the imagery of a victim appears early, beginning with hymn 5, stanza 1:

O Thou eternal Victim slain  
A sacrifice for guilty Man  
...  
An Offering in the Sinner's stead,  
Our everlasting Priest.<sup>114</sup>

In this stanza Christ is again presented as being simultaneously victim and priest. Here the victim is slain as a sacrifice on behalf of, and in the stead of, guilty humanity. This sacrifice of a victim is an offering that takes the place of the

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<sup>113</sup> WJW, vol 7, 315.

<sup>114</sup> Wesley, HLS, 5.

sinner. That Christ's description as an eternal victim refers to an understanding of the one sacrifice that endures throughout eternity. Rattenbury has observed that, "Christ finished a work on Calvary for the whole race; that it was finished on Calvary does not mean that it began there. The Nativity and other hymns give clear evidence that Charles Wesley thought of the whole life and death of Christ as the reconciling work of the Savior of mankind."<sup>115</sup> The sacrifice of Christ as the eternal Victim extends beyond the nativity narrative, for as John comments in an open letter to one of his critics:

Now I have found the ground wherein  
Firm my soul's anchor may remain;  
The wounds of Jesus, for my sin  
Before the world's foundation slain.<sup>116</sup>

This excerpt from *Hymns and Sacred Poems* says that the wounds of Jesus were not delivered at the cross but rather they extend through eternity to before the very foundation of the world. The eternal victim is slain to atone for sin.

The sacrifice of Christ and the work of atonement was certainly completed on the cross with his death, and yet there is an ongoing sacrifice of Christ which extends through eternity beyond this present age. Again Rattenbury has noted:

Wesley's conception of the Eucharist is that, while it is an instrument whereby toning grace is received by penitent and believing men and its joys are an anticipatory pledge of heavenly feasts to come, it is itself a memorial to the death of Christ on the Cross and the earthly counterpart of the sacrifices still being pleaded by our great High Priest in Heaven. So far as it deals with the death of Christ, it deals with a 'finished work'; so far as it deals with the heavenly sacrifice, with an 'unfinished work.'<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Rattenbury, *Evangelical Doctrines*, 207-208.

<sup>116</sup> Wesley, John. *A Second Letter to the Author of the Enthusiasm*, vol. 11, ed. Gerald R. Cragg. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 395.

<sup>117</sup> Rattenbury, *Evangelical Doctrines*, 189.

For example, hymn 140 says that the sacrifice of the eternal lamb occurs simultaneously in the past and present:

He dies, as now for us He dies!  
 That All-sufficient Sacrifice  
 Subsists Eternal as the Lamb,  
 In every Time and Place the same,  
 To all alike it co-extends,  
 Its Saving Virtue never ends.

He lives for us to intercede,  
 For us He doth this Moment plead,  
 And all who could not see Him die  
 May now with Faith's interior Eye  
 Behold him stand as slaughtered there,  
 And feel the Answer to His Prayer.<sup>118</sup>

The following stanza pleads with the Father to aid those who are laden with sin and misery so that they may benefit from Christ's "Infinite Atonement." Henry Bett has noted that the definition of "virtue" has changed since the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Today virtue connotes moral excellence, however, in this particular hymn the "saving virtue" of the sacrifice lamb refers to something other than morality. Bett notes that in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the definition of virtue was influenced by the Latin word *virtus* which means strength, power and efficacy.<sup>119</sup> To say that the sacrifice lamb provides a "Saving virtue" is to say it has power to save.

The verb tense in stanza one is present tense. The sacrifice of Christ occurred in centuries past and yet the reality of that event continues during the sacrament. Christ is the Eternal Lamb who is unchanging. The second stanza affirms that Christ lives to intercede and does in "this moment" plead. Notice in this stanza

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<sup>118</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 118,

<sup>119</sup> Bett, *Hymns of Methodism*, 44.

the eyes of faith that are able to perceive this sacrifice and the significance of “feeling” the answer to Christ’s heavenly intercession.

Again the Lord’s Supper is understood to be a sacrifice because through the “expressive bread” the people of God encounter the crucified Christ. Hymn 36 refers to the divine Victim to illustrate the concept of propitiation: “Our Guilt and Punishment He took, / And died a Victim for Mankind.”<sup>120</sup> It is worth noting the difference between guilt and punishment.

In the essay, “The Doctrine of Original Sin According to Scripture, Reason and Experience” John Wesley argues that all of humanity shares in the guilt of Adam and Eve’s sin. Using the work of Dr. Jennings, Wesley says:

We suffer death in consequence of their transgression. Therefore we are, in some sense, guilty of their sin. I would ask, What is guilt, but an obligation to suffer punishment for sin? Now since we suffer the same penal evil which God threatened to, and inflicted on, Adam for his sin; and since it is allowed, we suffer this for Adam’s sin, and that by the sentence of God, appointing all men to die, because Adam sinned; is not the consequence evident? Therefore we are all some way guilty of Adam’s sin.<sup>121</sup>

Guilt is the condition or state of sinful humanity, not primarily a feeling, and the punishment is the consequence of being guilty before a Holy God. The penalty for sin is nothing less than alienation from God on account of his judgment towards sinful humanity, and this alienation cannot be overcome until the judgment is satisfied. This is where propitiation becomes necessary since sinful humanity can be reconciled to a Holy God only if God acts first to avert His wrath. This is expressed clearly in the sermon, “Salvation by Faith.” In this

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<sup>120</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 27.

<sup>121</sup> Wesley, John, *The Doctrine of Original Sin According to Scripture, Reason and Experience*, n.p. *The Works of John Wesley: The Jackson Edition, vol 9. Letters and Essays, on CD-ROM*. Abingdon Press, 2005.

sermon, John Wesley describes justification as being saved from sin's guilt. His definition of justification is as follows:

The plain scriptural notion of justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sins. It is that act of God the Father whereby, for the sake of the propitiation made by the blood of his Son, he 'showeth forth his righteousness (or mercy) by the remission of the sins that are past.<sup>122</sup>

In a similar sermon Wesley states that justification is to be saved by faith from the guilt of sin:

Now they are 'justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. Him God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for (or by) the remission of the sins that are past.' Now hath Christ 'taken away the curse of the law, being made a curse for us'. He hath 'blotted out the handwriting that was against us, taking it out of the way, nailing it to his cross'. 'There is therefore no condemnation now to them which believe in Christ Jesus.'<sup>123</sup>

In both sermons propitiation is necessary to satisfy the righteous judgement of God and serves as the grounds for justification. This is consistent with and foundational to hymn 36 from *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* which refers to the divine Victim as an illustration of the concept of propitiation: "Our Guilt and Punishment He took, / And died a Victim for Mankind." The hymn obviously suggests substitutionary atonement as the victim dies *for* humanity.

Stanza 3 of hymn 36 continues to develop this theme by demonstrating how the imagery of a victim implies propitiation:

His Blood procur'd our Life and Peace,  
And quench'd the Wrath of hostile Heaven;  
Justice gave way to our Release,  
And God hath all *my* Sins forgiven.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> WJW, vol 1, 189.

<sup>123</sup> WJW, vol 1, 122.

<sup>124</sup> Wesley, HLS, 27.

The justice and the wrath of “hostile Heaven” were satisfied only by the sacrifice of the Victim as described in the preceding stanza. The victim described in this hymn took the guilt, punishment and “quenched the wrath of hostile heaven” in the act of propitiation by dying for humanity. The demands of Divine Justice, likewise, are satisfied only as sins are borne away through the act of expiation. The theology expressed in this hymnal is clear and consistent: expiation and propitiation function simultaneously in the act of atonement.

### **f) Altar**

An altar is necessary as the venue of priestly sacrifice. Throughout the hymnal, in both the introduction and the poetry of the hymns, Christ is referred to as the altar where the sacrifice is made. For example, in the introduction John writes, “I come then to God’s Altar with a full Persuasion, that these Words, *This is my Body*, promise me more than a *Figure* ....”<sup>125</sup> The hymns will continue to speak of the altar not in terms of the Communion Table<sup>126</sup>, but rather with reference to Christ himself. For example, hymn number 18 says:

See the slaughter’d Sacrifice,  
See the Altar stain’d with Blood!  
Crucified before our Eyes  
Faith Discerns the Dying God.<sup>127</sup>

The Altar in this verse is stained with blood and is the slaughtered Sacrifice. To see the sacrifice, who is Christ, is to see the Altar where the sacrifice is made. It is the body of Christ crucified that is the altar, and not the table or a railing at the front of the church.

Hymn number 25 begins with a statement of approach: “In an accepted Time of Love / To Thee, O Jesus, we draw near.” Through the poetry of this hymn, the believer approaches Christ. The next two lines are a petition: “Wilt Thou not now the Veil remove, / And meet thy mournful Followers here.” The question is where is this divine meeting place where the people are seeking to meet with

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<sup>125</sup> *Christian Sacrament*, HLS, 13.

<sup>126</sup> Admittedly both John and Charles Wesley are not consistent on this point. In the hymnal Charles Wesley will use poetic license and say that the communion table is an altar, as in the example of hymn 57 which has the line “Angels round our Altars bow” (HLS, 41). The Book of Common Prayer, in an effort to counter any suggestion of transubstantiation, expressly forbids any use of the term altar.

<sup>127</sup> Wesley, HLS, 14.

Christ? The answer is that the people are waiting at the Altar. The stanza concludes: “Who humbly at thy Altar lie, / And wait to find Thee passing by?”<sup>128</sup>

Hymn number 137, from the section of hymns “Concerning the Sacrifice of our Persons,” refers to joining with “Christ our Righteousness.” The previous stanza describes how the believer is joined to Christ:

Mean are our Noblest Offerings,  
Poor feeble unsubstantial Things;  
But when to him our Souls we lift,  
The Altar sanctifies our gift.<sup>129</sup>

The believer is joined to Christ “our righteousness” by receiving the Lord’s Supper which entails a “sacrifice of our persons.” The sanctification of “Mean, Poor, feeble unsubstantial offerings” occurs on the altar. The altar is not the communion table or a prayer-railing at the front of the church, but the very body of Christ. It is Christ himself, and only Christ, who sanctifies the gifts of God’s people. The communion table and a railing at the front of the church are useless instruments for sanctification and therefore only Christ can properly be referred to as an Altar.

In some contemporary Protestant congregations, such as the Free Methodist Church, the people commonly speak of the “altar” when referring to the communion table or a prayer-railing at the front of the church. According to Wesley, the only altar is Christ Himself or else the suffering of Christ on the cross is denied. The introduction to the Eucharistic hymnal says: “And so now it is Christ himself, with his Body and Blood, once offered to God upon the Cross, and ever since standing before him as slain, who fills his Church with the Perfumes of

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<sup>128</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 19-20.

<sup>129</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 117

his Sacrifice....”<sup>130</sup> An altar by definition is a venue of sacrifice. The atonement is a finished work and Protestants thoroughly repudiate any suggestion of a repeated sacrifice. To speak of an altar in a Protestant church, therefore, is to introduce (however unintentionally) a theology of the sacrifice of the mass. If the altar is referred to independent of the Lord’s Supper, as in the case of an “altar call,” the implication is that the response of the sinner seeking salvation somehow contributes to the sacrifice that is necessary for redemption. The danger of this theology is the suggestion that the sinner “going forward” is an aspect of the atonement instead of the atonement eliciting the sinner’s response to the atonement that is already completed by Christ on the cross. The obvious question with an ‘altar-call’ is whether or not salvation is operative if one chooses to remain seated rather than moving to the front of the church. Semi-Pelagian heresy plagued the early church, and it is creeping into contemporary Protestantism through the misuse of the term “altar.”

This hymnal uses language of sacrifice, priest, victim and altar. It is interesting to note that Christ is simultaneously the priest, victim and the altar. There are no other sacrifices, priests, victims or altars involved in the Lord’s Supper. Christ alone fulfills all these roles thus satisfying the requirements for atonement.

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<sup>130</sup> *Christian Sacrament, HLS*, 14.

### **g) Lamb**

There is little question concerning the significance of Scripture as a source for the hymns of Charles Wesley. One writer has noted that, “it is not unusual to find over a dozen biblical passages fused together in one of Charles’s verses.”<sup>131</sup> Lamb in Scripture is far more than a poetical device. In the Older Testament, lambs were sacrificed in the temple and in the Gospel of John (1:29, 36) Jesus is identified as the Lamb of God. It is worth noting that in the Older Testament:

... the overwhelming majority of passages containing the term ‘lamb’ refer to sacrifice of one kind or another. There are a few references of a general character, but the great majority concern the offering of a sacrifice. In the canonical Old Testament the LXX uses the noun *ἀμνός* a total of 96 times, and of these no less than 85 refer to the offering of a lamb or lambs in sacrifice (71 refer to the burnt offering). Add to this a reference to the taking away of sin and I do not see how a reference to sacrifice can possibly be excluded.<sup>132</sup>

The opening section of the introductory extract in *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* begins with a section on “The importance of well understanding the nature of this sacrament.” The introduction begins with a comparison of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper with the ancient practice of the Passover meal:

So that the Holy Sacrament, like the Antient Passover, is a great Mystery, consisting both of *Sacrament* and *Sacrifice*; that is, of the Religious *Service* which the People owe to God, and of the full *Salvation* which God has promis’d to his People.<sup>133</sup>

It is important to note in the above quotation that the sacrament and Passover meal both imply a sacrifice. The Lord’s Supper and the Passover also function in much the same manner:

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<sup>131</sup> Tyson, *Charles Wesley: A Reader*. 34.

<sup>132</sup> Morris, *Apostolic Preaching*, 142.

<sup>133</sup> Wesley, *Christian Sacrament*, HLS, 3-4.

Therefore, as at Passover, the late Jews could say, *This is the Lamb, these are the Herbs our Fathers did eat in Egypt*; because these latter Feasts did to effectually represent the former: So at our Holy Communion, which sets before our Eyes Christ *our Passover who is sacrificed for us* ....<sup>134</sup>

There should be no surprise therefore to find the imagery of the lamb to include qualities of the Passover lamb. For example, hymn 3 stanza 3 refers to the “spotless Lamb of God.”<sup>135</sup> The following hymn mentions the “Pascal Lamb” in “Our Passover [who] was slain.” Hymn 35 also begins “O Thou Pascal Lamb of God.” Hymn 22 uses the imagery of the sacrificial lamb in order to communicate the theology of atonement. In stanza 3, line 3, there is a reference to the “wounded lamb.” This wounded lamb is a substitutionary sacrifice that “hangs, and bleeds to Death for me.”<sup>136</sup> Recall the understanding of Christ as an Eternal Lamb whose sacrifice reaches beyond the foundation of the world and continues through the intercession of Christ as High Priest. In a similar manner the Pascal lamb in hymn 51 is also sacrificed as a substitution: “Thou very Pascal Lamb, / Whose Blood for us was shed.”<sup>137</sup> The imagery of the lamb is frequently associated with the concept of the sacrifice, as in hymn 53 which describes the “Lamb of God as slain appear”,<sup>138</sup> or as seen in hymn 81 with “...the Lamb, the Crucified.”<sup>139</sup> In case there was any confusion about the implications of this sacrifice for the sinner, hymn 74 defines the lamb as “Jesus our atoning Lamb.”<sup>140</sup> Hymn 78 begins with a reference to the Lamb of God, and stanza 4 says:

Clear us by thy Condemnation

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<sup>134</sup> Wesley, *Christian Sacrament, HLS*, 5.

<sup>135</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 3.

<sup>136</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 18.

<sup>137</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 37.

<sup>138</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 38.

<sup>139</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 69.

<sup>140</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 52.

Slain for All, Let thy Fall  
Be Our Exaltation.<sup>141</sup>

This short verse contains much theology. The Lamb of God is a sacrifice *for all*. The deserved condemnation of the sinner settles on the lamb who serves as a substitution that diverts the wrath of God. Even though the word is never used, the theology of propitiation is the foundation for this particular verse since the condemnation is diverted away from the sinner clearing them of their guilt. In the above stanza Wesley employs an exchange motif where Christ's humiliation procures humanity's exaltation. Christ's "Fall" is our "Exaltation." A similar expression is found in the sermon "God's Love to Fallen Man." Without God's love to fallen humanity, John states that we would be unable to say:

'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself; or that he 'made him to be sin' (that is, a sin-offering) 'for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God through him'. There would have been no such occasion is for such 'an advocate with the Father' as 'Jesus Christ the righteous'; neither for his appearing 'at the right hand of God to make intercession for us'.<sup>142</sup>

This sermon quotation draws on several Scripture references, the first two coming from 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians chapter 5 (verses 19 and 21). Here the exchange motif illustrates the aspect of atonement known as expiation. The Lamb of God is sacrificed as a "sin-offering" and the sins which once separated wicked humanity from a Holy God are removed and borne away.

Hymn 105 clearly describes the substitutionary aspect of this sacrifice in the line, "Shout the lamb that died for all"<sup>143</sup> and hymn 111 mentions "The Lamb for

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<sup>141</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 67.

<sup>142</sup> *WJW*, vol. 2, 426.

<sup>143</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 90.

“Sinners slain.”<sup>144</sup> Hymn 116 refers to the “spotless Lamb” who “didst for all Mankind atone.”<sup>145</sup> All of these examples illustrate the doctrine of atonement in the imagery of the lamb. The clearest examples can be seen in the larger collection of *Hymns for the People called Methodists*. With an obvious reference to John 1 verse 29 where John the Baptist points to the lamb of God who bears sin away, hymn 125 stanza 6 says, “Open mine eyes the Lamb to know / Who bears the general sin away!”<sup>146</sup> Here the sacrifice of the Lamb expiates sin away from the sinner. Likewise hymn 389 says, “The Lamb shall take my sins away”<sup>147</sup> and hymn 451 says, “Lamb of God, who bear’st away / All the sins of mankind.”<sup>148</sup> In each of these examples of the imagery of Lamb as presented in the general collection expresses the concept of the sacrifice of Christ as an image that represents the unlimited atonement available to all. This theme is found throughout *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*.

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<sup>144</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 94.

<sup>145</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 98.

<sup>146</sup> *WJW*, vol. 7, 237.

<sup>147</sup> *WJW*, vol. 7, 563.

<sup>148</sup> *WJW*, vol. 7, 630.

### **h) Blood**

Any sacrifice of an animal, such as a Lamb, naturally involves the shedding of blood. Teressa Berger has stated “The word *blood* is used by Wesley almost exclusively in reference to the blood of Christ and indicates a shorthand formulation for Christ’s work of redemption by his suffering and death on the cross.”<sup>149</sup> As previously mentioned, an evangelical doctrine of redemption depends on the theology of the atonement. In a letter ‘To the reverend Mr. Law occasioned by some of his late writings,’ John Wesley draws on several passages from Hebrews, in particular chapter 9 verse 22, which says that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. Atonement and blood are therefore inseparable. The occasion for this letter is William Law’s blending of ‘philosophy and religion.’ After quoting several passages by Law from a variety of sources, Wesley summarizes Law’s position by claiming that he says, “(1.) There is no vindictive, avenging, or punitive justice in God. (2.) There is no wrath or anger in God. (3.) God inflicts no punishment on any creature, neither in this world, nor that to come.”<sup>150</sup> Ultimately this position denies any concept of justification or atonement, for without a punitive justice in God there would be no need for propitiation, or reconciliation between sinful humanity and a Holy God through atonement. The following lengthy excerpt serves to connect the concepts of sacrifice, victim, lamb and blood with the doctrine of atonement. Wesley

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<sup>149</sup> Teressa Berger, *Theology in Hymns? A Study of the Relationship of Doxology and Theology According to a Collection of Hymns for the People Called Methodists* (1780). Translated by: Timothy E. Kimbrough. (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995), 120.

<sup>150</sup> John Wesley, “An Extract of a Letter to the Reverend Mr. Law. Occasioned by some of his Late Writings,” n.p. *The Works of John Wesley: The Jackson Edition, vol 9. Letters and Essays, on CD-ROM*. Abingdon Press, 2005.

himself uses a lengthy passage by William Law and writes, "I have quoted this passage at some length, that the sense of it may appear beyond dispute." The following lengthy excerpt by Wesley is employed with the same intention:

From all which it appears, that Christ was not only a pattern, but, first and principally, the surety of the new covenant, yea, a sacrifice and a victim for the sins of his people; 'whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.' (Rom. iii. 25.) And that precious sacrifice offered on the cross is the very centre and marrow of the gospel. To that one offering whereby our great High Priest 'hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified,' (Heb. x. 14,) all the ancient sacrifices referred, as well as numberless other types and figures. 'All these,' says the Apostle, 'were shadows of things to come; but the body is Christ.' (Col. ii. 17.) He it was, who, 'not by the blood of bulls and goats, but by his own blood, entered into the holiest, having obtained eternal redemption for us.' (Heb. ix. 12.) In consequence of this we are accepted, 'through the offering of the body of Christ once for all.' (x. 10.) In all the ancient types and figures, 'without shedding of blood there was no remission;' which was intended to show, there never could be any without the blood of the great Antitype; without that grand propitiatory sacrifice, which (like the figure of it) was to be offered 'without the gate.' "Indeed, the whole worship of the Old Testament teaches nothing else but the satisfaction made by the blood of Christ, and our reconciliation with God thereby: Hence he is styled, The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world;" 'with a view to the paschal lamb, and the other lambs that were offered in sacrifice: On which account the inhabitants of heaven likewise 'give glory, and sing a new song, because he hath redeemed' them 'unto God by his blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.' (Rev. v. 9.)<sup>151</sup>

This passage begins with Wesley saying that Christ is a victim for the sins of the people. This is a substitutionary sacrifice and, drawing on Romans 3:25, is described as an act of propitiation. The relentless vigour with which Wesley dismantles Law's writings is because a denial of propitiation is nothing less than a rejection of 'the centre and marrow of the gospel.' In order to refute Law and defend the Gospel, Wesley provides verse after verse

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<sup>151</sup> John Wesley, "An Extract of a Letter to the Reverend Mr. Law. Occasioned by some of his Late Writings," n.p. *The Works of John Wesley: The Jackson Edition, vol 9. Letters and Essays, on CD-ROM.* Abingdon Press, 2005.

to emphasize the act of propitiation in the shedding of the blood of the lamb who is a sacrificial victim. Christ is also described as the High Priest who presents the sacrifice which happens to be himself as the victim. There should be no surprise in finding the imagery of blood in *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* is consistent with the teaching found in this letter to William Law. In the above quote from the Letter to William and in *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, the imagery of blood is used to describe the atonement.

Hymn 123, for example, begins with a reference to the Old Testament offerings and sacrifices of goats and bullocks. These Old Testament sacrifices all borrowed and foreshadowed their effectiveness from the virtue of Christ's shed blood. Stanza 3 says:

Those Feeble Types and Shadows Old  
Are all in Thee the Truth fulfill'd,  
And thro' this Sacrament we hold  
The Substance in our Hearts reveal'd;  
By Faith we see thy Sufferings past  
In this Mysterious Rite brought back,  
And on thy grand Oblation cast  
It's saving Benefit partake.<sup>152</sup>

The blood of Christ is an oblation, a sacrifice on behalf of others to satisfy the wrath of God. Hymn 36 also describes the sacrifice as an act that satisfies the demands of Divine justice:

His Blood procur'd our Life and Peace,  
And quench'd the Wrath of hostile Heaven;  
Justice gave way to our Release,  
And God hath all *my* Sins forgiven.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 104.

<sup>153</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 27.

Here the shed blood quenches the wrath and hostility of heaven, and this is of course the doctrine of propitiation where Christ absorbs the wrath of God in his substitutionary death.

Hymn 3, which refers to the “spotless Lamb of God,” celebrates the merit of the sacrificial blood in the lines “He bears my Sins on yonder Tree, / And pays my Debt in Blood”<sup>154</sup> and hymn 12 links the purchase of blood with atonement: “The Purchase of his Blood, / His Blood which once for All atones.”<sup>155</sup> Atonement is purchased through the shed blood of the sacrificial Lamb. The same expression is found in hymn 16 with the lines “All receive the Grace Atoning, / All the Sprinkled Blood receive”<sup>156</sup> These lines are shaped in a chiastic structure where “Grace Atoning” is paired with “Sprinkled Blood” in the following line. The form of these lines conveys the theology that grace atoning comes from sprinkled blood.

In hymn 116 the sacrificial blood is personified and continues to express this theme:

Thou standest in the Holiest Place,  
As now for guilty Sinners Slain,  
The Blood of Sprinkling speaks, and prays  
All-prevalent help for Man,  
Thy Blood is still our Ransom sound,  
And spreads Salvation all around.<sup>157</sup>

Here the speaking blood prays and intercedes on behalf of humanity. The closing lines of this stanza reaffirm the shed blood serves as a ransom price. The same expression is found in hymn 121 which says, “The Blood that speaks our Sins

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<sup>154</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 3.

<sup>155</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 11.

<sup>156</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 13.

<sup>157</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 98.

forgiven.”<sup>158</sup> In all these examples, the shed blood of Christ as the sacrificial lamb is the ground of justification. It has been noted that modern exegetical study and theological writing consider “ransom” as synonymous with “deliverance” but inside and outside the New Testament “...the payment of a price is a necessary component ....”<sup>159</sup> The theology expressed in *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* is consistent in describing ransom in terms of propitiation: the averting of God’s wrath by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God and his shed blood. The blood of Christ is the necessary payment price for the ransoming of sinful humanity.

It has been noted that, “Charles Wesley’s ‘biblicism’ runs much deeper. His use of language moves within the biblical world, its pictures, vocabulary, and imagery. Charles Wesley, the poet, speaks the language of Scripture as if it were his mother tongue.”<sup>160</sup> It is therefore worthwhile to consider the Biblical definition of ‘ransom’ (a further discussion on the usage of the term ‘ransom’ in this hymnal will follow).

The Older Testament employs three different terms to describe ‘ransom.’ The first term, pdh (*padah*) is used in reference to the deliverance brought by God from the oppression in Egypt. It is also used in reference to the deliverance from the power of death. The term significance of the term is the cost of redemption through a substitutionary offering of a life. A modern understanding would import the concept of a recipient where the ransom is paid to a person. This would transform the substitutionary payment into a bribe and that is not consistent with the Scriptural usage.

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<sup>158</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 102.

<sup>159</sup> Morris, *Apostolic Preaching*, 61.

<sup>160</sup> Berger, Teresa. *Theology in Hymns*, 81.

The second term used in the Older Testament to describe ‘ransom’ is *kpr*. The emphasis here refers to a ‘covering over’ in propitiating sin and the means whereby atonement is made.<sup>161</sup> The terminology refers to propitiation whereby God acts to avert His own wrath by expiating sin.

The third term used in the Older Testament to describe ‘ransom’ is *g'l*. This term refers to the individuals involved in a ransom:

The members of the family in this wider sense had an obligation to help and to protect one another. There was in Israel an institution of the *go'el*, from a root which means ‘to buy back or to redeem’, ‘to lay claim to’, but fundamentally its meaning is ‘to protect.’ ... The *go'el* was a redeemer, a protector, a defender of the interests of the individual or group.<sup>162</sup>

The cause of those needing a ransom to be paid is assumed by the person who will ransom them. The emphasis involved with this terminology is upon the subject who does the ransoming.

In the LXX the term implies a substitution as a payment for a ransom price. The other meanings remain subsumed in the broader implication of the word. The New Testament word for ransom is *λυτρόν* and is found only in Mark 10:45. Some have called into question the authenticity of this passage due to its unique occurrence in the Gospel of Mark and therefore assume it to be an ecclesiological addition. The assumptions are refuted by Leon Morris who then turns to consider the meaning of *λυτρόν* in Mark 10:45.<sup>163</sup> After defending the authenticity of this Gospel saying of Jesus, and the subsequent consideration of its implication,

<sup>161</sup> G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 281.

<sup>162</sup> Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (trans. John McHugh; Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 21.

<sup>163</sup> See Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, pp.29-36 for a defence of the authenticity of this New Testament saying of Jesus. The remainder of that chapter considers the word group associated with *λυτρόν*.

Morris writes, “Thus we have seen that there is no substantial reason for doubting the authenticity of the passage, and that the words, taken at their face value, contain a substitutionary meaning, indicting the offer of life for life quite in the style of Leviticus 27:11.”<sup>164</sup> John and Charles Wesley did not share in the liberal questioning of Scripture but accepted it at face value as the Word of God. A study on *John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture* examined the sermon on the “Catholic Spirit” and observed:

Within seven paragraphs, then, there are thirty-eight different quotations from seventeen different books of the Bible. Seven are from the Old Testament, eighteen from Pauline books, eleven from the Gospels and Acts, and two from Hebrews. They all serve to describe a heart that is right with God. While nowhere else in the Wesley corpus can such a long string of quotations be found, there are many occasions where texts from different books and both testaments are put together to make the same point. Wesley is able to do this only because he understands Scripture to be a whole.<sup>165</sup>

For either John or Charles Wesley to reject the authenticity of Mark 10:45 would demand nothing less than an entire rejection of Scripture as a whole. Their use of the terminology of “ransom” therefore intentionally draws on all these Biblical implications of the term.

Hymn 131 draws on Old Testament typology. The first stanza begins with a reference to the Victim who comes to the altar of his cross as a lamb to be slaughtered. Having introduced this sacrificial imagery, the following stanza reads:

Him ev’n now by Faith we see:  
Before our Eyes He stands!  
On the suffering Deity

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<sup>164</sup> Morris, *Apostolic Preaching*, 36.

<sup>165</sup> Scott J. Jones, *John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture*. (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995), 153.

We lay our trembling Hands,  
 Lay our Sins upon his Head,  
 Wait on the dread Sacrifice,  
 Feel the lovely Victim bleed,  
 And die while Jesus dies.<sup>166</sup>

This stanza presents the sacrifice of a lamb to the believer who perceives it through the eyes of faith. It is far more than a passive encounter since one “feels the lovely Victim bleed.” The verb “feel” is yet another example of how language evolves. Today feelings suggest that which is subjective, but in 18<sup>th</sup> century England to “feel” means to confirm something as true through experience. For example, in *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, John begins by describing spiritual sensation. Through faith, one is able to see God (Heb. 11:27, 1 John 3:1), hear God (John 5:25) and even taste God through the “palate of the soul” (Luke 18:13). He then summarizes spiritual sensations through faith as follows:

It is the feeling of the soul, whereby a believer perceives, through the ‘power of the Highest overshadowing him,’ both the existence and the presence of him in whom he ‘live, moves, and has his being,’ and indeed the whole invisible world, the entire system of things eternal. And hereby, in particular, he feels ‘the love of God shed abroad in his heart.’<sup>167</sup>

To feel through the spiritual sensations of faith is to confirm the truth of God through experience and this leaves no room for doubt or questioning.

A similar example of this particular usage of the verb “feel” is found in John Wesley’s sermon, “The Witness of the Spirit: Discourse II.” In this sermon he states that the witness of the Spirit is an experience which one “feels” and this experience confirms the truth of the Gospel. The passage concludes with a stanza

<sup>166</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 112.

<sup>167</sup> Wesley, John. *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, vol. 11, ed. Gerald R. Cragg. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 47.

from *Hymns of Petition and Thanksgiving for the Promise of the Father* which includes a reference to “feeling” which functions as an experience which confirms the truth of Wesley’s discourse:

That ‘the testimony of the Spirit of God’ must, in the very nature of things, be antecedent to ‘the testimony of our own spirit’, may appear from this single consideration: we must be holy in heart and life before we can be conscious that we are so. But we must love God before we can be holy at all, this being the root of all holiness. Now we cannot love God till we know he loves us: ‘We love him, because he first loved us.’ And we cannot know his love to us till his Spirit witnesses it to our spirit. Till then we cannot believe it; we cannot say, ‘The life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.’

Then, only then we feel  
Our interest in his blood,  
And cry, with joy unspeakable,  
Thou art my Lord, my God.<sup>168</sup>

The “feeling” of the witness of the Spirit confirms the truth and the reality of being a child of God. To “feel the lovely Victim bleed” is not only to experience the sacrifice of Christ but to participate in it. The sins of the people are laid upon the head of the lamb who carries them away, therefore the sacrificial lamb serves to expiate these sins. A shorter verse that expresses the same concept is found in hymn 156:

Salvation to God,  
Who carried our Load,  
And purchased our Lives with the Price of his Blood.<sup>169</sup>

The Load referred to is both the burden of sin and the penalty for sin under the justice of God. That the load is carried implies expiation and propitiation, the two elements that compose atonement. The high estimation of the sacrament found in

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<sup>168</sup> WJW, vol 1, 289-290.

<sup>169</sup> Wesley, HLS, 130.

this hymnal is due to the association between the wine and blood and the reality they represent. A clear example is presented in hymn 54:

Communion closer far I feel  
And deeper drink th' Atoning Blood,  
The Joy is more unspeakable,  
And yields me larger Draughts of God,  
'Till Nature faints beneath the Power,  
And Faith fill'd up can hold no more.

There is unspeakable joy in the sacrament because the drink is not merely wine, but the blood of the lamb, and in particular the blood that atones.

### **i) Smoke and Fire**

In the above discussion concerning the imagery of bread, the image of fire is used in describing the process of making bread. In the introduction John wrote how bread is baked with fire, and this is a metaphor for Christ suffering the wrath of God (also found in hymn 2). Smoke and fire are images that are also closely associated with the concept of sacrifice. For example, in hymn 2 the expressive bread becomes the “spotless lamb of God.” This lamb then becomes a bleeding sacrifice:

His Life to ransom ours is given,  
And lo! the fiercest Fire of Heaven  
Consumes the sacrifice.<sup>170</sup>

Fire represents the wrath of God consuming the sacrifice. Smoke rises from the fire as the sacrifice is consumed. A sinner would never dare to approach the fire of God since it describes the fiercest wrath of Heaven, but the propitiation of Christ diverts the fiery wrath of God away from sinful humanity and therefore hymn 3 mentions that this flame of wrath is extinguished.<sup>171</sup>

In hymn 117 the worshipper comes to Holy Communion and through the eyes of faith perceives the Lamb who once suffered and continues to offer Himself to God. While the flame of wrath is extinguished, the fire and sacrifice remain. Hymn 116 draws several images together (divine victim, spotless lamb, and shed blood) and then refers to the smoke rising from the fire that consumes the sacrifice:

The Smoke of thy Atonement here  
Darken'd the Sun and rent the Vail,

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<sup>170</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 3.

<sup>171</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 3.

Made the New Way to Heaven appear

....  
 He still respects thy Sacrifice,  
 It's Savour Sweet doth always please,  
 The Offering smoaks thro' Earth and Skies,  
 Diffusing Life and Joy and Peace,  
 To these thy lower Courts it comes,  
 And fills them with Divine Perfumes.<sup>172</sup>

The smoke of the atonement, also called “Sacred Smoke” in hymn 117, is spread throughout heaven and earth. The smoke in these hymns is described as a having a pleasing and sweet savour. Concerning the “perfume” and smoke divine, Gordon Wenham writes in his commentary on Leviticus:

The idea that sacrifice pleases God is expressed in the phrase characteristic of Lev. 1-3 ... *offering for the Lord which has a soothing aroma* (e.g., 1:9, 13, 17). The Hebrew word order makes it clear that the sacrificial aroma soothes the Lord, not man ...Sacrifice is the appointed means whereby peaceful coexistence between a Holy God and sinful man becomes a possibility.<sup>173</sup>

In the New Testament the pleasing aroma is related not to the smoke of an offering but rather describes the Church. 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 2 verse 15 states, “For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing” (ESV). Hymn 116 and 117 with their references to the smoke of the sacrifice are the first two hymns in the section, *The Holy Eucharist as it implies a Sacrifice*. The next section of the hymnal is entitled *Concerning the Sacrifice of our Persons*. To be sure, there is nothing a believer can contribute to the Sacrifice of Christ, nor is the sacrifice of Christ ever repeated, but the theology of the Lord’s Supper calls for a response of the believer, as in hymn 137:

Whate'er we cast on Him alone  
 Is with His great Oblation one,

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<sup>172</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 98.

<sup>173</sup> Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (NICOT, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), 56.

His Sacrifice doth Ours sustain,  
And Favour and Acceptance gain

....  
Mean are our Noblest Offerings,  
Poor feeble unsubstantial Things;  
But when to him our Souls we lift,  
The Altar sanctifies the Gift.

....  
Mixt with the sacred Smoke we rise,  
The Smoke of his Burnt Sacrifice,  
By the Eternal Spirit driven  
From Earth, in Christ we mount to Heaven.<sup>174</sup>

Everyone singing these stanzas would avoid an overestimation of their sacrifice because the best, or the most noble offerings, are considered mean, poor, feeble and unsubstantial. But the sanctifying grace of the Lord's Supper is certain, and the believer is mixed with the smoke of Christ's offering. In his New Testament Commentary on 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 2 verse 15 John writes, "God is well-pleased with this perfume diffused by us."<sup>175</sup> The smoke arising from the sacrifice of Christ envelops the believer who is united with Christ.

The epic 22-stanza hymn that concludes *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* considers this sacrament to be the catalyst for revival and a means of returning to the faith of the primitive church. In that hymn the early church is described as the "True followers of their Lamb-like Lord," "Impregnated with Life divine," and "Glad rivals of the heavenly Choir." The Church of the eighteenth century, however, is described with negative terms, "The Life of God extinct and dead," and "Those who by thy Name are nam'd, / The Sinners unbaptiz'd out-sin." What has happened to the Church to account for such a sad decay? This hymn points to hearts that have grown cold and "Cast the means away." The conclusion to the

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<sup>174</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 116-117.

<sup>175</sup> John Wesley, *Wesley's Notes on the New Testament*, n.p.

hymn is a prayer that God would revive His work, melt the rebels “into gracious tears!” The prayer for revival centres on the Lord’s Supper:

O wouldest Thou to thy Church return!  
 For which the faithful Remnant sighs,  
 For which the dropping Nations mourn,  
 Restore the daily Sacrifice.<sup>176</sup>

Why would a *daily* celebration of the Lord’s Supper restore the Church? The explanation is found here in this concept of fire. Again the hymnal has an entire section devoted to the sacrifice of our persons, and as the introduction states, “this Great Sacrifice sustains and sanctifies those Things, that are thrown into his Fire, hallow’d upon his Altar, and together with him consecrated to God.”<sup>177</sup> Fire purifies the believer as they join in the sacrifice of Christ when they receiver the Lord’s Supper. The smoke of the offering is an aroma pleasing to God, and the Church is the fragrance of God in the world.

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<sup>176</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 141.

<sup>177</sup> Wesley, *Christian Sacrament*, *HLS*, 27.

#### **4) Vocabulary**

So far this study has explored the imagery of sacrifice, bread, wine, the victim, lamb, and the blood. These images express the doctrine of atonement through the concepts of expiation and propitiation. A similar study of the vocabulary of atonement will reveal the theological understanding of the Lord's Supper is consistent throughout the entire hymnal. The language associated with the atonement includes the terminology of covenant, purchase, and ransom.

Whenever the term atonement is used in the collection *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, there is no hesitation on the part of the Wesleys to argue for unlimited atonement. For example, hymn 12 stanza 7 says that "His Blood which once for All atones."<sup>178</sup> Likewise hymn 16 emphasizes that all may receive the atonement in the chiastic lines: "All receive the Grace Atoning, / All the Sprinkled Blood receive."<sup>179</sup> Hymn 25 refers to the "all-atoning Lamb"<sup>180</sup> and hymn 68 speaks of the "all-atoning blood"<sup>181</sup> of this lamb. Once again hymn 79 says, "Th' Atonement Thou for All hast made"<sup>182</sup> and hymn 105 joyfully declares, "Shout the Lamb that died for all."<sup>183</sup> Hymn 26 refers to Jesus as the "World's Redeemer."<sup>184</sup> It has been noted that the language of atonement for "all" is mentioned over 300 times in some of the later Wesleyan hymns.<sup>185</sup> John Wesley's sermon on "Free Grace" argues that the invitation for salvation extends to all of humanity. Concerning the doctrine of double predestination Wesley says,

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<sup>178</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 11.

<sup>179</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 13.

<sup>180</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 20.

<sup>181</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 49.

<sup>182</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 68.

<sup>183</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 90.

<sup>184</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 20.

<sup>185</sup> Tyson, *Reader*, 37-38.

"It is to represent the most high God ... as more cruel, false, and unjust than the devil. This is the blasphemy clearly contained in 'the horrible decree' of predestination."<sup>186</sup> The horrible decree states that if some are predestined or elected to salvation by the unchanging will of God, the remainder of humanity is necessarily condemned with no hope of salvation because of another decree and not merely because they were passed over. Knowing full well of the classical definition, John Wesley exploits the term "horrible" in it's vulgar or common sense.<sup>187</sup>

It must be remembered that whenever one reads the word "atonement" in the works of either John or Charles the foundation is free grace and unlimited atonement. The vocabulary surrounding the definition of atonement includes the spiritual terminology of covenant, and the legal terminology of purchase and ransom.

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<sup>186</sup> WJW, vol 3, 556.

<sup>187</sup> For a more detailed discussion on Wesley's view of unlimited atonement, see Horton Davies chapter "Charles Wesley and the Calvinist Tradition" in *Charles Wesley Poet and Theologian*. Ed. ST. Kimbrough Jr.. Nashville: Kingswood books, 1992.

### **a) Covenant**

The terminology of covenant is introduced early in the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*. It is in the very first hymn, and this concept conveys the understanding of atonement that is found throughout the hymnal. Notice the doctrine of unlimited atonement in line 4 of the following stanza:

This is my Blood which seals the New  
Eternal Covenant of my Grace,  
My Blood so freely shed for You,  
For you and all the Sinful Race,  
My Blood that speaks your Sins forgiven,  
And justifies your Claim to Heaven.<sup>188</sup>

Unlimited atonement is found in the quiet reference that Christ's blood was shed for *all* the sinful race. In this introductory hymn the concept of covenant is employed to describe the atonement. It is a covenant between a Holy God and sinful humanity and this covenant is sealed by the Blood of Christ. Without the blood, lamb and sacrifice, there is no covenant. The terminology of covenant refers to all the sacrificial imagery that has been used to describe the atonement. In hymn 58 the term is "Cov'nant Blood."<sup>189</sup> While not using the specific word "covenant" hymn 38 "Worthy Lamb of Endless Praise" employs the concept of a covenant and here again it is closely associated with atonement:

To make our Right and Title sure,  
Our dying Lord Himself hath given,  
His Sacrifice did all procure,  
Pardon, and Holiness, and Heaven.<sup>190</sup>

The final line succinctly describes a Wesleyan soteriology, with pardon referring to justification, holiness as sanctification, and heaven as glorification. The

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<sup>188</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 2.

<sup>189</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 42.

<sup>190</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 28.

covenant is foundational to all aspects of human redemption. A covenant is an agreement between two parties, and in terms of redemption the question is how sinful humanity can enter into a right relationship with a Holy God. Although the terminology of covenant is absent from this particular hymn, the concept is present and the entire hymn draws on the imagery of a sacrificed lamb. To make sinful humanity's right and entitlement secure, to fulfill humanity's obligation under the covenant with God, God Himself entered into it of His own initiative and acted on humanity's behalf. The sacrifice of the lamb is God Himself suffering the consequences of humanity's violation of the covenant. This is the doctrine of atonement, and the line "Our dying Lord Himself hath given" describes propitiation.

### **b) Purchase and Ransom**

The terminology of purchase and ransom are closely associated since a ransom entails a purchase price. In hymn 45 both terms are used in subsequent lines: “Could none but Christ the Ransom find, / Could none but Christ the Pardon buy.”<sup>191</sup> Here one must be careful in the theology of ransom as the terminology suggests that sinful humanity is being held hostage. Rattenbury has expressed it in the following manner:

We reject it as crude and antiquated, just as the Wesleys had rejected the ransom theory of Origen ....which declared that the Atonement was a bargain with the devil, who had certain rights over the slaves of sin who were liberated by the death of Christ . . . . What the Wesleys did declare was that God, the Holy Trinity, with one mind, independently of the consent of mankind, took the initiative in the salvation of fallen man.<sup>192</sup>

This initiative in redeeming sinful humanity is propitiation. The threat to sinful humanity was not that they were being held hostage by the devil; it was that sinful humanity fell condemned under the judgment and wrath of God. By his sacrifice Christ diverted this wrath in the act of propitiation thus providing the means for atonement. The ransom referred to in hymn 45 is not from bondage to the devil, it is in fact deliverance from the judgement and wrath of God:

Our souls Eternally to save  
 More than ten thousand Worlds he gave;  
 That we might know our Sins forgiven,  
 That we might in thy Glory shine,  
 The Purchase-Price was Blood Divine,  
 And brought the Aceldema of Heaven.<sup>193</sup>

Again the ransom is not being paid to free humanity from the grip of the evil one; it is to provide for the forgiveness of sins. Humanity is ransomed, according to

<sup>191</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 33.

<sup>192</sup> Rattenbury, *Evangelical*, 195.

<sup>193</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 33-34.

line 3 of this stanza, so “that we might know our sins forgiven.” It is important to note that here, as in other places in the hymnal, the vocabulary of ransom refers to atonement because here the purchase-price is “Blood Divine.” Hymn 116 states that the blood of the divine victim and spotless lamb makes the ransom sound. Again it is important to notice that here the Ransom is being made “for guilty sinners” and is an offering of the eternal priest (who is also victim and altar) in the “Holiest Place.”<sup>194</sup> The ransom is being offered up to God the Father, there is no suggestion of a bargain with the devil. Hymn 119 continues this concept. The opening stanza says that God the Father sees only sin and misery in the worshipper. The hymn is a petition for God to look away from the sinner and instead see His anointed one. The second stanza reads:

Turn from me thy glorious Eyes  
To that bloody Sacrifice,  
To the full Atonement made,  
To the utmost Ransom paid.<sup>195</sup>

The obvious question here is to whom is the ransom paid? The first line of the third stanza refers to the “Blood that speaks above.” The ransom price is the bloody sacrifice that makes “full atonement.” This shed blood is the propitiation of Christ on behalf of sinful humanity that fulfills the demands of the covenant before the Holy God. The covenant required sinful humanity to suffer under the wrath of divine justice, yet this was averted by the sacrifice of Christ. The closing lines of that stanza suggest a parallel between making atonement and paying a ransom. The two terms are drawn so very close together that they become synonymous.

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<sup>194</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 98.

<sup>195</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 101.

Hymn 128 refers to the unlimited atonement in describing the crucifixion where Christ suffers for all of humanity. “Thy Self our utmost Price hast paid, / Thou hast for all Atonement made.”<sup>196</sup> A similar expression can be found in Hymn 124 that says that Christ “Did fully once for All atone, / Thy Blood hath paid our utmost Price.”<sup>197</sup> The purchase price, or the cost of ransoming sinful humanity, was the shed blood of Christ. This sacrifice is “all-sufficient” and remains for eternity. This first stanza of 124 goes on to mention that angels and men would strive in vain to add anything to this sacrifice since there is no way to augment the atoning virtue of Christ’s death. There is therefore no need to contribute towards or repeat the sacrifice, and any attempt to do so is considered blasphemous. The Reformer’s disavowal of the sacrifice of the mass is continued in this Wesleyan hymnal. The second stanza concludes by saying the sacrifice is “all-complete” and can never more be repeated. Stanza two begins with a “yet” and refers to the celebration of Communion. It is a daily event that shows Christ’s offering to the Father in this tremendous mystery. Communion is more than breaking bread, it is to “Present Thee bleeding on the Tree / Our everlasting Sacrifice” Stanza two concludes with this petition: “Father, behold thy dying Son! / Ev’n now He lays our Ransom down, / Ev’n now declares our Sins forgiven.”<sup>198</sup> That hymn began with a reference to the blood paying the utmost price. That price fulfills the requirements for ransoming sinful humanity. What is absent here is any suggestion of the bargain with the devil, but what is most evident is the theology of the atonement. The vocabulary of a ransom price describes

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<sup>196</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 109.

<sup>197</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 105.

<sup>198</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 105.

propitiation, the act of Christ diverting the wrath of God away from sinful humanity.

Hymn 2 refers both to the ransom and the price paid. In each instance the vocabulary used is descriptive of the atonement. For example, stanza 3 says, “He bears my Sins on yonder Tree, / And pays my Debt in Blood.”<sup>199</sup> The payment price is shed blood, and the fact that Christ bears sin is describing expiation. The following stanza refers to the ransoming effect and describes propitiation. “His Life to ransom ours is given, / And lo! the fiercest Fire of Heaven / Consumes the Sacrifice.”<sup>200</sup> Atonement is expiation and propitiation, and both terms are described through the vocabulary of a ransom price.

Hymn 13 refers to the ransomed worshippers, universal redemption, and the atonement:

The Badge and Token This,  
 The sure confirming Seal,  
 That He is Ours, and we are His,  
 The Servants of his Will,  
 His dear peculiar Ones  
 The Purchase of his Blood;  
 His Blood which once for All atones,  
 And brings us now to God.<sup>201</sup>

One must be careful with the vocabulary from the eighteenth century. Henry Bett’s work *The Hymns of Methodism* lists several common terms found in Wesley’s hymns that have a definition that has evolved over time. ‘Peculiar’ is one of those words. In present day usage, peculiar simply means that which is odd or unusual. In seventeenth century Latinism, peculiar is derived from

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<sup>199</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 3.

<sup>200</sup> Wesley *HLS*, 3.

<sup>201</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 11.

*peculiaris*, taken from *peculium*, meaning the private property that was allowed to belong to child or slave. The definition therefore extends to include one's own or that which belongs especially to one's self. The Scripture reference associated with this terminology is found in Exodus 19:5 “You shall be a peculiar people to me” and Deuteronomy 14 verse 2, “The Lord hath chosen thee to be a *peculiar* people unto Himself” (AV).<sup>202</sup> Communion offers a token where the bread and wine are considered “confirming seals.” What is confirmed in this sacrament is a sense of possession where the people belong to God and God belongs to the people. The people are made peculiar to God by the purchase price; again the reference here is to the shed blood, and it is blood that atones for all.

Hymn 79 makes a similar petition with the elements of Communion. The themes found in this hymn include universal atonement and the ransom:

Jesu regard the plaintive Cry  
The groaning of thy Prisoners here,  
Thy Blood to every Soul apply,  
The Heart of every Mourner clear,  
The Tokens of thy Passion shew,  
And meet us in thy Ways below.

Th’Atonment Thou for All hast made,  
O that we all might now receive!  
Assure us now the Debt is paid,  
And Thou hast died that all may live,  
Thy Death for All, for us reveal,  
And let thy Blood *my* Pardon seal.<sup>203</sup>

Stanza one concludes with the petition for God to meet the groaning prisoners in God’s own appointed means. The ransom price of redeeming the prisoners is of course the shed blood, found in line 3. Stanza two begins with universal

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<sup>202</sup> Bett, *Hymns of Methodism*, 38.

<sup>203</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 68.

atonement in that the sacrifice was made for all. This is also found in line 4 where “all may live.” The petition in stanza 2 line 3 is for assurance of salvation. Assurance of salvation is assurance of the debt being paid in full. Again this stanza returns to the theme of sacrifice where Christ has died that all may live. The conclusion to this hymn is the petition, “And let thy Blood *my* Pardon seal.” From the generic category of groaning prisoners this hymn concludes on a personal note with the personal pronoun “my.” The penitent sinner is released by the ransom price of shed blood. The celebration of the Lord’s Supper is God’s own appointed means for receiving both grace and assurance of salvation, and ultimately the terminology of Communion is a celebration of the atonement.

## **5) Correspondence**

The letters of John and Charles Wesley reveal a development in their thought and Eucharistic practice. Letters that pre-date 1738 reveal an inquisitive exploration of theology and spirituality. For example, in a letter to Susana Wesley dated June 18, 1725, John is questioning the value of reading Thomas à Kempis and Jeremy Taylor. With Jeremy Taylor the concern is whether the rules for Holy Living and Dying had what he considered impractical elements. As for à Kempis, John is questioning the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit and assurance of salvation. John writes:

I take the more notice of this last sentence because it seems to contradict his own words in the next section, where he says that by the Lord's Supper all the members are united to one another, and to Christ the Head; the Holy Ghost confers on us the graces we pray for, and our souls receive into them the seeds of an immortal nature. Now surely these graces are not of so little force as we can't perceive whether we have 'em or not; and if we dwell in Christ and Christ in us, which he will not do till we are regenerated, certainly we must be sensible of it. If his opinion be true, I must own I have always been in a great error; for I imagined that when I communicated worthily, i.e. with faith, humility, and thankfulness, my preceding sins were *ipso facto* forgiven me – I mean, so forgiven that unless I fell into them again I might be secure of their ever rising in judgment against me, at least in the other world. .... Humility is undoubtedly necessary to salvation.<sup>204</sup>

In the above passage, John's confesses to his mother that his difficulty with à Kempis is the apparent contradiction regarding the assurance of salvation. It is interesting to note that from this correspondence dated pre-1738, John says that "humility is necessary to salvation," however after his Aldersgate experience the term humility will be replaced by faith. After 1738 it will no longer be humility that is necessary for salvation, but faith alone. From the writings of Thomas à

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<sup>204</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 25, ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 169-170.

Kempis, John recognizes that through the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, one is united to fellow believers and also to Christ. This theology would continue through his later life, and evidence of it can be found in the Eucharistic hymnal. The organization of the hymnal includes a section where the Lord's Supper implies a sacrifice of the people:

Christ never design'd to offer himself for his People, without his People; no more than the High Priests of old ... Therefore, as it was necessary, that they who sought for Atonement should wait upon the Sacrifice; so it is, that whoever seeks Eternal Salvation, should wait at that Altar, the Cross, whereon this eternal Priest and Sacrifice, was pleas'd to offer up himself.<sup>205</sup>

In this passage it is the Cross of Christ alone that is the altar where a sacrifice is made, and nothing else. The theology of believers being united to Christ through the sacrament is present in this early letter, and appears later in the Eucharistic hymnal.

It is interesting to note that the excerpt from John's correspondence with his mother concluded with a conviction that humility was "undoubtedly" necessary for salvation. In the preceding quotation from the Eucharistic hymnal introduction, salvation is described in terms of the atonement, with no reference to humility. This shows a development in the theology of John Wesley. After his conversion experience of 1738, faith in the atonement replaces any concept of humility being required for salvation.

While some of his theology developed, other elements remained the same. The letter where John discussed Thomas à Kempis with his mother states that through communion one is united to Christ, but also with other believers. Several

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<sup>205</sup> Wesley, *Christian Sacrament*, HLS, 25.

years later, in 1750, John writes to Rev. Gilbert Boyce and re-emphasizes this aspect of Communion:

God's first design is to save you and me, and every man round about us. That is, to renew us in his image, and then receive us to glory. To this immediate end of renewing each soul in love, and in the whole mind which was in Christ, he has pointed out several means, many of which we cannot use, at least not fully, without joining together. A company of men joining together for this purpose we are accustomed to call a church.<sup>206</sup>

In this letter John makes it clear that one cannot use the means of grace without “joining together” with other believers. Some of the theology John Wesley gathered from the spiritual classics and authors such as Thomas à Kempis, remained with him throughout his life.

In another letter to his mother, dated June 11, 1731, John is concerned with how he is perceived by others, and the concern in this letter is with the charge of enthusiasm. He concludes the letter by saying, “If you who are a less prejudiced judge have perceived us faulty in this matter, too superstitious or enthusiastic, or whatever it is to be called, we earnestly desire to be speedily informed of our error, that we may no longer spend our strength on that which profiteth not.”<sup>207</sup>

John is seeking spiritual direction from his mother and the means of grace is a topic of discussion. Could an excessive emphasis on the Lord’s Supper result in what he termed, being ‘righteous overmuch’ or simply too strict in religion? Wanting to avoid that extreme, John describes his thoughts on the matter and states that this spiritual threat of enthusiasm was possible by emphasizing one spiritual discipline to the extent that it clashes with another. He acknowledges that it is possible to put too much stress on the means of grace, neglect “weightier

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<sup>206</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 26. ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 419.

<sup>207</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 25, ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 283.

matters of the law,” or multiplying prudential means and being bound so strictly to them that the advancement in holiness is hindered. He then acknowledges that some critics suspect both John and his brother Charles “...of being too strict in this last sense, of laying burdens on ourselves too heavy to be borne, and consequently too heavy to be of any use to us.”<sup>208</sup> This concern of being labelled an “enthusiast,” however, would not deter the John or Charles in their constant Eucharistic practices.

In another letter addressed to a friend, John writes without the uncertainty of receiving the sacrament frequently. In the letter of July 19, 1731 John writes with the authority of one giving the spiritual direction: “Are you inattentive in prayer? Pray oftener. Do you address to God twice a day already? Then do so three times. Do you find yourself very uneasy before sacrament, though you receive it every month? Your next resolution, with God’s leave, should be to receive it every week.”<sup>209</sup> In the sermon, *The Duty of Constant Communion*, this advice is John Wesley’s answer to the fourth objection to receiving Communion frequently. The fourth objection he lists is that some have not yet received the benefit they desire from the sacrament. He acknowledges that this is the case with many well meaning people, and his first answer is that receiving Communion is a command of God: “This therefore we are to do, because he commands, whether we find present benefit thereby or not. But undoubtedly we shall find benefit sooner or later though perhaps insensibly.”<sup>210</sup> If someone has not found a benefit from the practice, his advice is for them to continue the practice, to go to the Lord’s Table

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<sup>208</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW* vol 25, ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 283.

<sup>209</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 25, ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 304.

<sup>210</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 3, ed. Albert C. Outler. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 437.

as often as possible until the benefit is made clear. The correspondence said if one was uneasy before the sacrament that, “your next resolution, with God’s leave, should be to receive it every week” and this is the same advice given in the sermon *The Duty of Constant Communion*.

In a letter from Susana Wesley on February 21, 1732, she advises John concerning the presence of Christ during the Lord’s Supper. While admitting the mystery surrounding the sacrament and declining to speculate on how Christ is present, she writes to her son John that, “the divine nature of Christ is then eminently present to impart (by the operation of his Holy Spirit) the benefits of his death to worthy receivers.”<sup>211</sup> In other words, what Susana Wesley writes to her son is that the presence of Christ during Communion applies the merits of the atonement. The elements of Communion are therefore far more than bare signs for “...we receive, not only the sign, but with it the thing signified, all the benefits of his Incarnation and Passion!”<sup>212</sup> Once more this theology can be found in the Eucharistic hymnal through the vocabulary and imagery of the atonement. The benefits of Christ’s death are the merits of the atonement.

In the introduction to the hymnal, and indeed throughout, one can find the significance of the Lord’s Supper being situated between two extremes: a bare memorial and idolatry or a repeated sacrifice. Similar to the theology found in the letter from Susana Wesley, John writes that the signifier and the signified are one and the same: “*This is my Body, when he gave the Disciples the Figure of his Body;* Especially because this Sacrament duly receiv’d, makes the thing which it

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<sup>211</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 25, ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 326.

<sup>212</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 25, ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 326.

represents, as really present for our Use, as if it were newly done.”<sup>213</sup> John responds to his mother’s letter and expresses agreement with her theology about the presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper. On February 28, 1732 John wrote to his mother that, “...we can’t allow Christ’s human nature to be present at it without allowing either con- or trans <-su>bstantiation<sup>214</sup>. But that his divinity is so united to us then as he never is but to worthy receivers I firmly believe, though the manner of that union is utterly a mystery to me.”<sup>215</sup> Just who are the worthy receivers that are referred to in this letter? In the sermon, *The Duty of Constant Communion*, this question of worthiness is explored. Some would refuse to receive Holy Communion because they did not feel worthy enough, or because they feared eating in an unworthy manner as warned against in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:29. Unworthiness is the first objection to a frequent sacrament that Wesley addresses. He does not deny that humanity is unworthy to receive mercy from God, but since God does offer His mercy it is incomprehensible as to why that offer would be refused. “God offers you a pardon from all your sins. You are unworthy of it, ’tis sure, and he knows it: but since he is pleased to offer it nevertheless, will not you accept it? He offers to deliver your soul from death. You are unworthy to live. But will you therefore refuse life?”<sup>216</sup> He concludes this section by saying, “For if we are not to receive the Lord’s Supper till we are worthy of it, it is certain we ought never to receive it.”<sup>217</sup> This sermon was preached by John on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1732, only a week before the correspondence

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<sup>213</sup> Wesley, *Christian Sacrament*, HLS, 5.

<sup>214</sup> “...indicate conjectural readings where the original text is defective.” WJW, Vol. 25, p. xv

<sup>215</sup> Wesley, John. WJW, vol 25, ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 328.

<sup>216</sup> WJW, vol 3, 433.

<sup>217</sup> WJW, vol 3, 436.

with his mother where he considers the divinity of Christ as being united to worthy receivers through the sacrament, and in that letter he confesses that ‘the manner of that union is utterly a mystery to me.’

The correspondence also reveals controversy surrounding the sacrament. In a letter to his brother, Samuel Wesley Junior, on November 23, 1736, John admits that he nearly made “shipwreck” of his faith on the rock of the mystics. He refers specifically to Johann Tauler (1300-1361), Miguel de Molinos (c.1640-1697) and the anonymous author of the *Theologia Germanica*. He then composes his own summary of the mystic doctrine that is highly critical of their position. The mystics argue that the means of grace are used only as necessary, and once the end is achieved the means must cease. Public prayers are neglected since the thought is that one prays without ceasing. Scripture is also neglected and thought of as merely a letter from One they supposedly converse with face to face. Finally the Lord’s Supper is neglected because “they never cease to *remember* Christ in the most acceptable manner.”<sup>218</sup> A few years later, this concern with the mystics would become a public debate.

A letter dated August 5-8, 1740 is addressed to Count Zinzendorf and the Church at Hernhut. This is a Moravian society where the members are advised “...not to use those ordinances which our church terms means of grace, till they have such a faith as implies a clean heart, and excludes all possibility of doubting. They have advised them, till then, not to search the Scriptures, not to pray, not to communicate.”<sup>219</sup> John then responds that some answer this objection that it is a

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<sup>218</sup> WJW, vol 25, ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 488.

<sup>219</sup> Wesley, John. WJW, vol 26. ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 27.

duty to receive the ordinances of God, and yet the society still did not feel bound to use them: “As those you mention in particular (viz., prayer, communicating, and searching the Scriptures), if a man have faith he need not, if he have not he must not, use them; a believer may use them, though not as enjoined....”<sup>220</sup> John then reports that there is a contradiction in the society. While they acknowledge a believer *may* use the means of grace, he then states that their claims deny the existence of “means of grace,” and that Christ did not ordain any for his church. Furthermore, “You will never have faith till you leave running about to church and sacrament and society ...And yet another ‘You have lost your first joy. Therefore you pray. That is the devil. You read the Bible. That is the devil. You communicate. That is the devil.’”<sup>221</sup> John Wesley’s response to this position is that their church discipline is both “novel and unprimitive throughout” and therefore they are not to be trusted. He identifies for the society how they have rejected the tradition of the Patristics in favour of the modern mystics as being the best interpreters of Scripture.<sup>222</sup>

The debate continues and the Moravian responded with their apologetic defence for stopping the use of the sacraments. John writes to the Reverend Benjamin Ingham on September 8, 1746 to say that the Moravian definition of “stillness” is as follows:

Not to use (what we term) the means of grace;  
 Not to go to church;  
 Not to communicate;  
 Not to fast;  
 Not to use *so much* private prayer;

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<sup>220</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 26. ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 27.

<sup>221</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 26. ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 28.

<sup>222</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 26. ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 29.

Not to read the Scriptures;  
 Not to do temporal good;  
 Not to attempt to do spiritual good.<sup>223</sup>

This position is clearly unacceptable to John, who continues to warn against the false doctrine being taught at the Fetter Lane Society through the influence of Count Zinzendorf. In a letter to his brother-in-law, John writes that Westley Hall was aligned with both John and Charles until he got involved with the Fetter Lane controversy. He traces back how Hall initially went to Salisbury and began a society there. “For a year or two you went with them to the church and sacrament, and simply preached faith by love.”<sup>224</sup> But then something happened. Eventually he ceased going to both church and sacrament, and this had devastating effects on the society that he led. “Your followers very soon trod in your steps; and not content with neglecting the ordinances of God they began, after your example, to despise them, and all that continued to use them, speaking with equal contempt of the public service, of private prayer, of baptism, and of the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>225</sup>

In yet another letter, dated November 27, 1750, addressed to the Reverend George Stonehouse, John lists several objections to the Moravian position. He does not approve of their doctrine that states that people are to do *nothing* for salvation but to believe. From this they claim there is only one duty and one command, to obey Christ and that this command abolishes the law, and every

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<sup>223</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 26. ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 216-217.

<sup>224</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 26. ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 271.

<sup>225</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 26. ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 271.

other duty or command.<sup>226</sup> In the sermon on the *Duty of Constant Communion*, obedience to Christ implies upholding the law and every duty including the one to receive the sacrament. He then objects to their assumption that those who consider it their duty to pray, read Scripture, or receive the sacrament, are in bondage, under the law, and seeking salvation by works. That some abuse the sacrament and means of grace in such a way that it is an attempt at works righteousness is not denied. In the sermon *The Means of Grace* John says, “I do expect that he will fulfill his Word, that he will meet and bless me in this way. Yet not for the sake of any works which I have done, nor for the merit of my righteousness; but merely through the merits and sufferings and love of his Son, in whom he is always well-pleased.”<sup>227</sup> He then summarizes their position by saying that “...till we believe, we ought to *be still*; that is, not to pray, search the Scriptures, or communicate.”<sup>228</sup> This theology is rejected as one of the Moravian doctrines that he “does not admire.” Over all he says their doctrine destroys faith, the love of God in the hearts of their disciples, their love for neighbours, humility, genuine simplicity, gratitude, justice, mercy and truth. This stillness controversy of rejecting the Lord’s Supper altogether appears in the collection *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*.

Charles Tyson has noted that “The Wesleys *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*, of 1745, should also be read against the backdrop of the stillness controversy and its concomitant impact on Eucharistic Methodism.” He then identifies hymn number

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<sup>226</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 26. ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 443.

<sup>227</sup> *WJW*, vol. 1, 391.

<sup>228</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 26. ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 444.

86 to be “...as direct a polemic against the Moravianized Methodists as appears in the collection.”<sup>229</sup>

Hymn number 86 begins by asking if people should let Communion go simply because they do not “feel” the benefits they desire. Stanza one and two conclude with questions: “Shall I forsake the Well?” and “cast the Means away?”<sup>230</sup> The response to these questions is found in the third stanza, which accurately describes the thoughts of John and Charles Wesley with regards to the stillness controversy occurring at Fetter Lane and other locations under the Moravian influence:

Get Thee behind me Fiend,  
On Others try thy Skill,  
Here let thy hellish Whispers end,  
To Thee I say, *Be Still!*<sup>231</sup>

This stanza makes it clear that the Wesley brothers consider the stillness controversy to be demonic. The force of the language in this stanza is worth noting. While the Moravians used the stillness language to describe their spiritual experience, this stanza turns their vocabulary against them: “To Thee I say, *Be Still.*” This is also the Biblical vocabulary of Christ calming the storm by commanding the wind and the waves to cease. This is a powerful reversal of their language used to undermine their position. Using the words of Christ calming the storm implicates their theology as being against the will of God, and therefore truly demonic. The fourth stanza explains that Jesus spoke the word, and the stanza concludes with a chiastic form that emphasizes the command of Christ to

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<sup>229</sup> Tyson, *Charles Wesley: A Reader*. 276.

<sup>230</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 73.

<sup>231</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 73.

"*Do This*" twice over: "*Do this in Memory of thy Lord, / Jesus hath said, Do This!*"<sup>232</sup> The hymn continues, and in stanza 5 the confession is that one needs no other motive than the word that comes from Christ. The sixth stanza makes it clear that obedience is not enslavement, but rather one's glory is to be able to comply cheerfully. Stanza 7 questions whether one could withstand the will of God. This is clearly set up in contrast to the Moravian position. The stillness controversy implies that Communion is for those who lack faith, and yet this stanza says:

His Will is good and just;  
Shall I his Will withstand?  
If Jesus bid me lick the Dust  
I bow at his Command.<sup>233</sup>

The implication of this stanza is that to reject the command of Christ to receive the Lord's Supper is in fact a deed that is sinful, wicked, disobedient, and prideful.

Yet another controversy that appears in the letters of John Wesley pertains to his missionary work in North America and in particular the incident with Mrs. Sophia Williamson. On July 5, 1737, John writes to Sophia Williamson to explain his reasoning for barring her from receiving the sacrament. He reports that in his diary entry for Sunday July 3, he "reproved Mrs Williamson for insincerity and other faults." He criticizes her for her neglect of public service, fasting, and communion, and then says, "But these things are small in comparison of what I dislike in your past behaviour."<sup>234</sup> The past behaviour that he objects to

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<sup>232</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 73.

<sup>233</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 74

<sup>234</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 25, ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 513.

is her interest in Mr. Mellichamp and Mr. Williamson. John Wesley felt that Sophia had lied and misled him with regard to her romantic inclinations. A few days later, he writes another letter to Mrs. Williamson. Once more he is explaining his actions in barring her from receiving the sacrament. This time he has two reasons. He firsts quotes the Book of Common Prayer, saying “‘So many as intend to be partakers of the Holy Communion shall signify their names to the curate at least some time the day before.’ This you did not do.”<sup>235</sup> He then goes on to explain:

And if any of those ...have done any wrong to his neighbours by word or deed, so that the congregation be thereby offended, the curate ...shall advertise him that in any wise he presume not to come to the Lord’s table until he hath openly declared himself to have truly repented.’ If you offer yourself at the Lord’s Table on Sunday, I will advertise you (as I have done more than once) wherein you ‘have done wrong’; and when you have ‘openly declared yourself to have truly repented,’ I will administer to you the Mysteries of God.<sup>236</sup>

Commenting on this incident, one Wesley biographer has claimed that, “It seemed plausible to Wesley’s enemies, as it has to more sympathetic biographers since, to suppose that Wesley’s behaviour here, however correct ecclesiastically, looks suspiciously like retaliation for his despised love.”<sup>237</sup> Regardless of the motive for barring her, one must not overlook the reasoning and justification Wesley provides. The motive may remain, but the reasoning he uses to justify his position is significant, especially when one considers whom Wesley would admit to the sacrament later in his life.

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<sup>235</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 25, ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 518.

<sup>236</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 25, ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 518.

<sup>237</sup> Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), 129.

A journal entry of Saturday June 28, 1740 was published and created controversy for John Wesley. This prompted a letter to Bishop Edmund Gibson (1669-1748) where Wesley attempts to clarify his journal entry. He faults the bishop for a letter from 1747 that does not precisely quote the journal of John Wesley. He states that the entry was written to show that he disagreed with those who taught only those with a full assurance of faith should receive the Lord's Supper. In the letter John quotes his own journal entry as it was written;

1. That the Lord's Supper was ordained by God to be a means of conveying to men either preventing, or justifying, or sanctifying grace, according to their several necessities.
2. That the persons for whom it was ordained are all those who know and feel that they want the grace of God, either to restrain them from sin, or to show their sins forgiven, or to renew their souls in the image of God.
3. That as much as we come to his table, not to *give* him anything, but to *receive* whatsoever he sees best for us, there is no previous preparation indispensably necessary but a *desire* to receive whatsoever he pleases to give.
4. that no fitness is required at the time of communicating but a sense of our state, of our utter sinfulness and helplessness; everyone who knows he is fit for hell being just fit to come to Christ, in this as well as all other ways of his appointment.<sup>238</sup>

What qualifies a person for the Lord's Supper is a desire to do the will for God and a hunger for holiness. The first point in this entry is what became the source of the debate. If preventing grace and justifying grace were available through the sacrament, that would suggest those who were in need of justification are welcome at the Lord's Table. The critics of John Wesley promptly asked what happened to due preparation. Some have asked whether the early Methodists had a so-called "open table" that invited anyone to receive. John C. Bowmer has argued it was not open to non-believers, but strictly a matter of assurance in that those who lacked assurance of faith and forgiveness could approach the table. He

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<sup>238</sup> WJW, vol 11, 341.

points out that “The chief thing is that the admission of non-members was *controlled*, that notes of admission were at best temporary, and that the *normal* way was for attendance at Communion to be inseparably linked with membership in society.”<sup>239</sup> If a non-believer was awakening to faith and desired salvation during a service of the Lord’s Supper, the invitation would be for them to receive with the expectation of joining a society for the purpose of discipleship and growth in holiness.

In a letter to Richard Tompson on July 25, 1755 Wesley says, “I agree with you that justifying faith cannot be a conviction that I am justified; and that a man who is not assured that his sins are forgiven may yet have a kind or degree of faith which distinguishes him not only from a devil, but from an heathen; and on which I may admit him to the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>240</sup> At this point in his life, John Wesley would admit a person to the Lord’s Supper without the witness of the Spirit giving assurance that his or her sins are forgiven. People without the assurance that their sins are forgiven, Wesley admits, may have a degree of faith and that alone qualifies them for the Lord’s Supper.

In the sermon, “The Duty of Constant Communion” Wesley states that sin does not disqualify a repentant believer from receiving the sacrament. “God offers you a pardon for all your sins. You are unworthy of it, ’tis sure, and he knows it: but since he is pleased to offer it nevertheless, will not you accept of it?”<sup>241</sup> The only ones he would forbid to receive Communion would be those who

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<sup>239</sup> John C. Bowmer, “A converting Ordinance and the Open Table,” *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, vol. 34 part 5, (March 1964): 112.

<sup>240</sup> Wesley, John, *WJW*, vol 26. ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 575.

<sup>241</sup> Wesley, *WJW*, vol. 3. ed. Albert Outler. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 433.

do not desire to pursue a holy life. For John this amounts to nothing less than a person renouncing Christianity. At stake here is the concluding section of the Eucharistic hymnal that is focused on the sacrifice of our persons. For those who are concerned with eating in an “unworthy manner” John turns to the Book of Common Prayer, and states that “all the preparation that is absolutely necessary is contained in those words, ‘Repent you truly of your sins past; have faith in Christ our Saviour … amend your lives, and be in charity with all men; so shall ye be meet partakers of these holy mysteries.’ All who are thus prepared may draw near without fear, and receive the sacrament to their comfort.”<sup>242</sup> In his conclusion to this message he acknowledges that “...in one sense we are all unworthy,”<sup>243</sup> and yet because by definition Communion is a means of receiving grace from God, if people struggle with sin or have weak faith but seek the grace of God they are the ones who are most qualified to receive the sacrament. This is a drastically different position from the view expressed in the letters to Mrs. Sophia Williamson. The letters to Mrs. Williamson suggests a bitter-love affair cloaked in obscure Ecclesiastical canons. His justification for barring her from receiving communion was due to his assessment of her situation, and his conclusion was that she was not worthy to receive it. His letters to her are significant when compared with what John Wesley would later write concerning the worthiness of those who receive Communion. In his sermon it is clear that it is Christ alone who qualifies us to receive, and that the worthiness of the communicant is irrelevant apart from that fact.

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<sup>242</sup> Wesley, *WJW*, vol. 3. ed. Albert Outler. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 436

<sup>243</sup> Wesley, *WJW*, vol. 3. ed. Albert Outler. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 439

Yet another controversy addressed through the letters of John Wesley is the relationship between the Methodist societies and the Church of England. Once again the Lord's Supper is at the centre of the debate. In a letter from the Reverend Gilbert Boyce, John Wesley's loyalty to the Church of England is called into question:

When I consider and reflect upon what you have said of the ministers and the people of the Church of England, having represented them more like the ‘synagogue of Satan’ than the pure and spotless spouse of Christ ... I stand astonished at your present conduct! ... You do separate from them in your societies and private bands, and yet not at the table of the Lord. Can this be justified? How sir? Can you write and preach so much against them, and actually separate from them, and yet consistently join with them? Really, sir, this is such a piece of conduct as far surpasseth my knowledge.<sup>244</sup>

John Wesley's response from May 22, 1750 is clear that it is not his intention to institute a new denomination. “No. I have no such design. It is not my design or desire that any who accept my help should leave the church of which they are now members.”<sup>245</sup> Wesley then states that he joins with the Church of England while using prudential means of grace (such as confession in the Methodist society) that the Church neither endorses nor forbids as they are “purely indifferent in nature.”

“John Wesley visited Wales almost annually from 1739 onwards, usually for short periods, a total of thirty-five visits, as well as passing through the country on a further eighteen occasions.”<sup>246</sup> In 1748 he found one congregation drifting from the Church of England, and in an open letter addressed to this congregation, John

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<sup>244</sup>Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 26. ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 421.

<sup>245</sup>Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 26. ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 425.

<sup>246</sup>Rupert Davies, *WJW* vol 9. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 238.

Wesley laments their apparent separation. From *Gair I'r Methodist*, Wesley confronts this controversy of separating from the Church of England:

Some of you have turned away from the Church of England in which you were brought up; you have forsaken the sacrament and the Church service. Why was this necessary? Without leaving the Church you can adhere to all the great and glorious truths of the gospel; and without turning your backs on either the sacrament or the Church prayers you can certainly be holy in your conduct. Why then did you have to leave the Church? I cannot understand this?<sup>247</sup>

For John Wesley, separating from the Church of England was inexcusable. For this reason he responded to those who desired a formal separation with another open letter. In *Reasons Against a Separation from the Church of England* (1758), the place of the Lord's Supper plays a significant role. "If it be said, 'But at the Church we are fed with chaff, whereas at the Meeting we have wholesome food,' we answer: (1). The Prayers of the Church are not chaff – they are substantial food for any who are alive to God. (2). The Lord's Supper is not chaff, but pure and wholesome for all who receive it with upright hearts."<sup>248</sup> As beneficial as the Methodist societies proved to be, John remained loyal to the Church of England, and part of that loyalty was due to the Book of Common Prayer and the significance of the Lord's Supper. His high estimation of Anglican liturgy and the significance of the sacraments were enough to say the Lord's Supper is not chaff, but "wholesome."

John Smith was yet another critic who questioned John Wesley's loyalty to the Church of England. Another controversy raised through their correspondence is the danger of the abuse of the sacrament. The topic is about those who appear

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<sup>247</sup> John Wesley, *WJW vol 9*. ed. Rupert Davies. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 244.

<sup>248</sup> John Wesley, *WJW vol 9*. ed. Rupert Davies. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 339.

to be “religious” but lack faith, and trust in going to church and sacrament as their means of securing salvation. In John Wesley’s letter of June 25, 1746 addressed to John Smith, he describes people who abuse the sacrament while lacking true faith. Lacking holiness these worldly individuals love the world, money and pleasure. They lack both the love of God and the love of neighbour, and yet they remain unaware of their true condition:

They say, ‘Peace, peace,’ ...but on what pretence? Why, on this very ground, because, they do such and such outward works. They go to church, and perhaps to the Lord’s table. They use (in some sort) private prayer. They give alms. And *therefore* they imagine themselves to be in the high road to heaven ... This is what I mean by ‘using outward works as commutations for inward holiness.’ I find more and more instance every day of this miserable self-deceit.<sup>249</sup>

Some took exception to John’s criticism of the Church of England, and yet what he saw was cause enough for concern. Concerning these self-deceived individuals, John writes, “The thing is plain and clear. But if you dislike the phrase, we’ll drop it and use another.”<sup>250</sup> The next term he uses to describe these individuals are those who “keep their church” and once again the sacrament plays a central role:

I mean, who practice neither justice nor mercy, and yet hope to go to heaven because they go to church and sacrament. Can you find no such men in the Church of England? I find them in every street. Nine times in ten, when I have told a tradesman, ‘You have cheated me, sold me this for more than it is worth’ (which I think is a breach both of justice and mercy), ‘Are you a Christian? Do you hope to go to heaven?’ his answer, if he deigned any answer at all, has been to this effect: ‘As good a Christian as yourself! Go to heaven? Yes, sure! *For I keep my church as well as any man.*<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 26. ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 200.

<sup>250</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 26. ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 200.

<sup>251</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 26. ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 201.

John Wesley's response to such a position is that it does more harm than good. Those who are self-deceived and "keep their church" may need to be confronted by the reality of sin. "Perhaps indeed if he fell into adultery or murder it might awaken him out of his dream, and convince him (as well as his neighbours) that this 'worship' is not a 'mitigation' but an *aggravation* of his 'wickedness.'"<sup>252</sup> The startling reality is that worship from a heart far from God, worship that comes from the lips of the wicked who harbour sin in their hearts, and worship that comes from a life lacking holiness, is in fact offensive and an abomination to God. The moralist trusting in his or her good works and church attendance as being a mitigation of their offence is in fact, as Wesley emphasized, *aggravating* and multiplying their wickedness. The abuse of the sacrament in this manner is not to be tolerated and is repulsive to God.

In this survey of the letters of John Wesley, whether he is seeking spiritual direction or giving it, and regardless of the occasion for the letter such as responding to critics and controversy, John is consistently promoting a high view of the sacrament. For example, in a letter to a friend on July 19, 1731 John wrote, "As to the instituted means, I likewise lay it down for a rule, that as 'none teach like God,' so there are none like them; and consequently that I am to use them every time I may, and with all exactness I can."<sup>253</sup> This expression, that he is to use the means of grace "...every time I may" also appears in a letter to his brother, Samuel Wesley Junior on Nov 17, 1731.

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<sup>252</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 26. ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 201.

<sup>253</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 25, ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 294.

Charles Wesley speaks in harmony with his brother John on matters of Communion. In a letter addressed to John Wesley, from June 28, 1740, Charles wrote,

Two rules are wanting: (1) That every person, before he can be admitted into the United Society, *be in business*; (2) allow of, and use, the means of grace. Is the weekly sacrament for my mother settled? And *my* band? And those at the Foundery? Pray let no more be admitted into the society till I come.<sup>254</sup>

The historical context for the Eucharistic practice where some communities celebrated the Lord's Supper once a month was not frequent enough to satisfy Charles. Writing to his brother, Charles advises that a principle should be developed to allow Communion for the societies so that they would have it more often. In a similar letter dated July 19, 1740 addressed also to John, Charles writes, "Is the weekly sacrament for my mother settled? And *my* band? And those at the Foundery? Pray let no more be admitted into the society till I come."<sup>255</sup> In both of these letters, Charles expresses his discontent with the standard Eucharistic practice of an infrequent celebration of Holy Communion, desiring something more for those he cares about. The simple solution to his discontentment concerning what he considered an infrequent sacrament is a weekly sacrament.

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<sup>254</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 26. ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 17.

<sup>255</sup> Wesley, John. *WJW*, vol 26. ed. Frank Baker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 20.

## **6) Sermons**

There are two sermons by John Wesley that are relevant to this topic, *The Duty of Constant Communion* and *The Means of Grace*. Charles composed his own tract concerning Acts 20:7 entitled, *And upon the First Day of the Week*. This tract, however, may simply be a ‘treatise’ for theological reflection and not a sermon.<sup>256</sup> Both of John’s sermons share the same theological emphasis: that the sacrament is considered both a command of God and a blessing, and these two points form the basis for answering all objections to the Lord’s Supper. The hymnal, not surprisingly, is thoroughly consistent with both of the sermons by John and the one by Charles. The Lord’s Supper is presented in the hymnal as a command and blessing, and the theology of the atonement does not change in the sermons.

Although the sermon *The Duty of Constant Communion* was originally preached before 1738, John provides the following note to the reader for when it was printed in 1787:

The following discourse was written above five and fifty years ago, for the use of my pupils at Oxford. I have added very little, but retrenched much; as I then used more words than I do now. But I thank God I have not yet seen cause to alter my sentiments in any point which is therein delivered.<sup>257</sup>

The fact that this sermon is consistent with the theology in the hymnal indicates that he is sincere when he says that he has yet to see any “cause to alter my sentiments in any point.” This sermon has been called “...Wesley’s fullest and

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<sup>256</sup> See Kenneth G.C. Newport. *The Sermons of Charles Wesley*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), chapter 4 pages 85-86.

<sup>257</sup> WJW, 3, 428.

most explicit statement of his eucharistic doctrine and praxis ....”<sup>258</sup> His message is an apologetic for a frequently observance<sup>259</sup> sacrament that begins with a note that it is strange that the Lord’s Supper is neglected by any that fear God and desire to save their souls, and yet he finds that nothing is more common than such neglect. The sermon considers Luke 22:19, *Do this in remembrance of me*, as both a command of God and as a blessing where “...the benefits of doing it are so great to all that do it in obedience to him....”<sup>260</sup> He then shifts to answer the objections that people raise, or the ‘...particular excuses which men commonly make for not obeying it.’ The first, concerning unworthiness, has already been discussed in an above section. A second objection is that some feel they do not have enough time to prepare for it. The third objection is the fear that a frequent observance will diminish its value and our reverence concerning it. The fourth objection is that people have received the Lord’s Supper often but have yet to experience or notice any great benefit. The fifth and final objection is that the official polity of the Anglican Church requires a service of the Lord’s Supper only three times a year. To answer each of these John applies the measure of “obedience and blessing” and therefore defends constant communion. He introduces the theme of the Lord’s Supper as a command by saying that it is the plain command of Christ found in the Scripture. To introduce the theme of the blessing John says that, “A second reason why every Christian should do this as

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<sup>258</sup> WJW, 3, 427-428.

<sup>259</sup> In the sermon John objects to the term “frequent communion” is ‘absurd to the last degree.’ He considers frequent too vague as it could imply once a year, once every seven years, once in a lifetime. Indeed once a month is frequent by some standards, but far less than ‘constant communion.’

<sup>260</sup> WJW, vol 3, 429.

often as he can is because the benefits of doing it are so great to all that do it in obedience to him; namely, the forgiveness of our past sins and the present strengthening and refreshing of our souls.”<sup>261</sup> The forgiveness of past sin is the purpose of the atonement made by Christ. In reading the Gospels and the passage from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians John points out that the design of this sacrament is “...the continual remembrance of the death of Christ ...”<sup>262</sup> therefore the atonement is central to the apologetic defense of a frequent observance of the Lord’s Supper.

The other relevant sermon that specifically addresses the topic of the Lord’s Supper is *The Means of Grace*. The sermon begins with the question, “are there any ‘ordinances’ now, since life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel? Are there, under the Christian dispensation, any ‘means’ ordained by God as the usual channels of his grace?”<sup>263</sup> This, says John, is a question that the early church would never have raised, unless it was by “...one who openly avowed himself to be a heathen.” He then defines the term “means of grace” as the “...outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end – to be the *ordinary* channels whereby he might convey to men preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.”<sup>264</sup> Those means of grace that he lists are prayer, Scripture (reading, hearing and meditating), and of course the Lord’s Supper, “and these we believe to be ordained of God as the ordinary channels of conveying his grace to the souls of men.” After covering these certain means of grace, he then lists the common objections to practicing these spiritual disciplines.

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<sup>261</sup> WJW, vol. 3, 429.

<sup>262</sup> WJW, vol 3, 430.

<sup>263</sup> WJW, vol. 1, 378.

<sup>264</sup> WJW, vol 1, 381.

In this sermon John lists three objections to the use of the means of grace. The first objection is that the use of the means of grace implies a trusting in them, secondly that these exercises lead to attempting salvation by works, and the third objection to the spiritual disciplines is that Christ is the only means of grace. The sermon concludes with a discussion on the manner of using the means of grace, and the sermon delivers three points of application. First, people using the means of grace are to have a “lively sense that God is above all means.”<sup>265</sup> This means that the ordinary channels of receiving the grace of God, such as Scripture, prayer, and sacrament are instituted by Christ, but God in His infinite wisdom can chose any means at any time for ministering grace to those in need. That God is not limited or confined to the “ordinary channels” opens up the possibility of “prudential means of grace.” In other words, all of life can be sacramental if a heart is attentive to the work of God. But if God so chooses to administer His grace through an extraordinary means, it does not necessarily hold that anyone else will receive the same grace through a similar means. The conclusion also reminds the congregation that the instituted means of grace have no inherent power, and that those using them should seek God, not the means as an end in itself. This point is critical for it makes it clear that these means of grace are not a tool in which believers can manipulate God. Christians have absolutely no control over the instituted means of grace, and yet Christ has promised himself unfailingly and therefore believers will certainly find Christ through these means, regardless of how they feel afterwards. That the grace of God can work in a Christian who is unaware of the fact was presented in the other sermon, *The Duty*

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<sup>265</sup> WJW, vol 1, 395.

*of Constant Communion.* Again the conclusion to *The Means of Grace* reminds the congregation that the Grace of God does not adhere to the instituted means. The emphasis and focus is that since the instituted means of grace have no inherent power, those using them should seek Christ alone and not consider the means as an end in itself.

The first reason for constant communion mentioned in the sermon *The Duty of Constant Communion* is that this is a plain command of Christ, and “that this is his command appears from the words of the text, ‘Do this in remembrance of me.’”<sup>266</sup> In discussing the Lord’s Supper in *The Means of Grace*, John says, “Here then the direction first given by our Lord is expressly repeated by the Apostle: ‘Let him eat,’ ‘let him drink’ (*ἐσθιέτω, πινέτω* - both in the imperative mood); words not implying a bare permission only, but a clear explicit command....”<sup>267</sup> The sermon *The Duty of Constant Communion* called the command a “plain command” and here it is referred to as a “clear explicit command” in the imperative mood. Both sermons agree that this is a command of God. This clear explicit command is indisputable and is Wesley’s response to the Quakers and the Moravian stillness controversy. To reject these means of grace, such as the Lord’s Supper, is to do so contrary to the clear explicit command.

The second reason for constant communion is because of the certain blessings that come from obedience. In the sermon *The Duty of Constant Communion*, John says:

A second reason why every Christian should do this as often as he can is because the benefits of doing it are so great to all that do it in obedience to

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<sup>266</sup> WJW, vol 3, 428.

<sup>267</sup> WJW, vol 1, 389.

him; namely the forgiveness of our past sins and the present strengthening and refreshing of our souls. .... The grace given herein confirms to us the pardon of our sins by enabling us to leave them.<sup>268</sup>

The freedom a child of God has after being released from the grip of sin is the confirmation and evidence of the relief and pardon from sin's guilt. The pardon of sin is confirmed by a believer being enabled to leave the life of sin in the past. Likewise the emphasis on the blessing received through the Lord's Supper is part of the apologetic defense in the sermon *The Means of Grace*:

And that this is also an ordinary stated means of receiving the grace of God is evident from those words of the Apostle which occur in the preceding chapter: 'The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion (or communication) of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?' Is not the eating of that bread, and the drinking of that cup, the outward, visible means whereby God conveys into our souls all that spiritual grace, that righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, which were purchased by the body of Christ once broken and the blood of Christ once shed for us? Let us all, therefore, who truly desire the grace of God, eat of that bread and drink of that cup.<sup>269</sup>

The claim in the sermon *The Duty of Constant Communion* is that "These two considerations" (the Lord's Supper as Command and Blessing) "will yield a full answer to all the common objections which have been made against constant communion; indeed to all that ever were or can be made."<sup>270</sup> Both sermons explore these two considerations of the Lord's Supper as command and blessing, and these two considerations are both present in the hymnal.

Before he examines the objections in *The Duty of Constant Communion*, John returns to the emphasis of the Lord's Supper as a command. After describing the blessing of the Lord's Supper John asks: "But suppose this were no mercy to us

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<sup>268</sup> WJW, vol 3, 429.

<sup>269</sup> WJW, vol 1, 389-390.

<sup>270</sup> WJW, vol. 3, 432-433.

... still I ask, Why do not you obey God's command?"<sup>271</sup> Or again he says, "should we grant it would be no mercy, that is not enough; for still the other reason would hold: whether it does you any good or none, you are to obey the command of God."<sup>272</sup> The first reason for constant communion is that the Lord's Supper is a command, and this reason is elevated above the second concerning the blessings it produces. The fact that God commands it is enough for obedience without any reference to possible benefits. Faith requires obedience before any rationalistic consideration. For example, in the Gospel passage where Jesus heals 10 lepers (Luke chapter 17 verses 11-19), Jesus commands the lepers to go to the temple. Verse 14 says that as the lepers went to the temple they were healed, and this means that before being healed the lepers began their journey to Jerusalem. Faith requires obedience before rationalistic consideration. That benefits are certain, however, adds to the argument. The significance of receiving the Lord's Supper is summarized in *The Duty of Constant Communion* by John saying:

Whoever therefore does not receive, but goes from the holy table when all things are prepared, either does not understand his duty or does not care for the dying command of his Saviour, the forgiveness of his sins, the strengthening of his soul, and the refreshing it with the hope of glory.  
Let everyone therefore who has either any desire to please God, or any love of his own soul, obey God and consult the good of his own soul by communicating every time he can<sup>273</sup>

To turn one's back on the Lord's Table is both disobedience and spiritual suicide. It is disobedient for ignoring the "dying command of his Saviour" and it is spiritual suicide to neglect "the forgiveness of his sins, the strengthening of his soul, and the refreshing it with the hope of glory." He says the same thing later

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<sup>271</sup> WJW, vol 3, 433.

<sup>272</sup> WJW, vol 3, 433.

<sup>273</sup> WJW, vol 3, 429-430.

on in other words, “Considering this as a command of God, he that does not communicate as often as he can has no piety; considering it as a mercy, he that does not communicate as often as he can has no wisdom.”<sup>274</sup> The piety evidenced by obeying the command, and the prudence in receiving the blessings are the foundation to the apologetic defense of constant communion, and these arguments are presented in both relevant sermons and the hymnal.

The introduction to the hymnal begins with a note that is almost repeated verbatim in the sermon *The Duty of Constant Communion*. The hymnal introduction says, “How careful then should every Christian be to understand, what so nearly concerns both his Happiness and his Duty! ... So much the more, let all who have either Piety toward God, or any Care of their own Souls, so manage their devotions ....”<sup>275</sup> In the sermon *The Duty of Constant Communion*, both piety and prudence are emphasized in a similar fashion to this passage from the introduction to the hymnal. Those who neglect this practice are described in *The Duty of Constant Communion* as not *understanding* their duty or the promised blessings.

The sermon *The Duty of Constant Communion* elevated the significance of the command by saying that even if there was no mercy received through the sacrament, the value of the command would be enough to answer all objections. Just as that sermon elevated the significance of the command over the blessings, hymn 84 is the poetic translation of this very argument from the prose. Lines 1

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<sup>274</sup> WJW, vol 3, 432.

<sup>275</sup> Wesley, HLS, 4.

and 2 ask, “And shall I let Him go? / If now I do not *feel*.<sup>276</sup> In other words, if there was no mercy or grace received through the sacrament, if I do not feel and blessing, would it be grounds for ceasing the practice? This was the argument presented in the sermon *The Duty of Constant Communion*. Faith requires obedience. The sermon *The Means of Grace* also emphasized that grace is certainly received through the instituted means of grace according to the promises of Christ. This hymn is the direct attack against the stillness controversy. The previous stanza asked if one should neglect the sacrament if no benefit was perceived, “If now I do not *feel*.” Stanza 4 answers:

Jesus hath spoke the Word,  
His Will my Reason is,  
*Do this* in memory of thy Lord,  
Jesus hath said, *Do this!*<sup>277</sup>

This stanza concludes by emphasizing the command in three ways: by the italicized text, through the chiastic repetition of the command *Do this*, and the emphasis of an explanation mark. The hymn goes on to say, “No other Motive, Lord, I need / No other Word than Thine.” Even if there were no mercy, God’s Word is enough. Another stanza from the same hymn responds with:

His Will is good and just:  
Shall I his Will withstand?  
If Jesus bid me lick the Dust  
I bow at his Command.<sup>278</sup>

Again in this stanza the command is emphasized without any reference to the blessings of the Lord’s Supper. This is identical to the argument that is presented in the sermon, only here it takes the form of poetry.

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<sup>276</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 73

<sup>277</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 73.

<sup>278</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 73-74.

The command is also emphasized in hymn number 30 that begins with the lines, “Jesu, at whose Supreme Command / We thus approach to God,” followed by the second stanza, “Obedient to thy gracious Word, / We break the Hallow’d Bread.”<sup>279</sup> The teaching in both sermons and the hymnal is consistent on this point that constant communion is a matter of obedience to the supreme command of God. The sermons and hymnal also agree that it is obedience for the sake of obedience alone, with no suggesting of the blessing.

There are blessings, however, received through the Lord’s Supper. These blessings include, as mentioned in *The Means of Grace*, “all that spiritual grace, that righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”<sup>280</sup> One goal of the hymnal is to situate the theology of the Lord’s Supper between the Roman Catholic view of transubstantiation and the opposite extreme of a bare memorialist. There is a danger described in the introduction to the hymnal of making the Lord’s Supper a “...false God, or an Empty Ceremony.”<sup>281</sup> With the real presence of Christ in the sacrament there are real blessings. Constantly receiving the sacrament produces all the blessings mentioned in both sermons. Hymn number 20 has four stanzas. Stanza one is an introduction that refers to the “Lamb of God” and his “Bleeding Love.” Stanza two refers to the need of sinful people with the petition for God to “Take all our Sins away; / Burst our Bonds and set us free.” The line “Burst our Bonds and set us free” is again the poetic translation of the prose from the sermon *The Duty of Constant Communion*, which says, “The grace given herein confirms to us the pardon of our sins by enabling us

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<sup>279</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 23.

<sup>280</sup> *WJW*, vol 1, 389-390.

<sup>281</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 4.

to leave them.”<sup>282</sup> The grace from the Lord’s Supper leads to holiness of heart and life. Hymn 20 stanza three refers to justification, and stanza four describes sanctification where the image of God is restored and the children of God are “perfected in holiness.”<sup>283</sup> The theology of this hymnal celebrates the multiple blessings received through the sacrament.

Indeed hymn number 42 says that the Lord’s Supper is the “richest legacy” (even greater than fasting, hearing the Word preached and prayer), and the blessing of God’s grace that produces in us justification, sanctification and glorification are described in one stanza:

Here all thy Blessings we receive  
Here all thy Gifts are given;  
To those that would in Thee believe  
Pardon, and Grace, and Heaven.<sup>284</sup>

Lines one and two of the above stanza both claim that **all** the blessings of God are given and received through the Lord’s Supper. In the final line, pardon refers to justification, grace is sanctification and heaven is where glorification occurs. To say that grace signifies sanctification indicates that there is a degree of poetic license at work in this stanza. The grace of God refers to the covenant and the faithfulness of God which ultimately results in sanctification, therefore grace is not a synonym for sanctification. Grace is no more to be equated with sanctification than with justification. Nevertheless, the stanza boasts of multiple blessings that are received through the sacrament, and this is similar to what was discussed in the section concerning the correspondence. In the journal entry that

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<sup>282</sup> WJW, vol 3, 429.

<sup>283</sup> Wesley, HLS, 15.

<sup>284</sup> Wesley, HLS, 31.

needed a defense, John wrote that the grace of God received through the Lord's Supper includes preventing, justifying, and sanctifying grace, according to the necessities of those who receive. The sermon *The Duty of Constant Communion* refers to all these blessings as "...one of the greatest mercies on this side of heaven."<sup>285</sup> The entire hymnal is a celebration of these two points, that the Lord's Supper is both a command and also a blessing to obey. Many of the hymns in this collection, when they speak of blessings, celebrate the limitless grace and mercy that are received through the sacrament.

One aspect of the Lord's Supper that is presented in the sermon *The Means of Grace*, and not *Constant Communion*, is the concept that there is no inherent or intrinsic power in the means of grace. It would be a gross misrepresentation of the sacrament and the grace of God to suggest that they are similar to a vitamin that conveys nutrients. Wesley's theology, as the following excerpt makes clear, is that grace is not quantified or objectified and then "packaged" into these ordinary channels:

Whosoever therefore imagines there is any intrinsic *power* in any means whatsoever does greatly err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. We know that there is no inherent power in the words that are spoken in prayer, in the letter of the Scripture read, the sound thereof heard, or the bread and wine received in the Lord's Supper; but that it is God alone who is the giver of every good gift, the author of all grace; that the whole power is of him, whereby through any of these there is any blessing conveyed to our soul.<sup>286</sup>

The introduction to the hymnal is consistent in this theological view of the means of grace. The teaching on this point avoids any objectification of the grace of God: "And I know that this *Bread* hath nothing in itself, which can impart Grace,

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<sup>285</sup> WJW, vol 3, 433.

<sup>286</sup> WJW, vol. 1, 382.

Holiness, and Salvation. But I know also, that it is the Ordinary Way of God, to produce his Greatest Works, at the Presence (tho' not by the Power) of the most useless Instruments.”<sup>287</sup> Biblical examples of God’s power working through the most useless examples include the rod of Moses parting the sea, the trumpets bringing down the walls of Jericho, Naaman being cured of a plague by washing in the Jordan, and shadows, oil and clothes healing the sick. Indeed the cross of Christ is the most powerful example of God’s power working through a useless, powerless object. God uses these useless instruments to show the power is all His. On this point, as in the other examples, both relevant sermons and the hymnal are consistent in their theology.

That the elements of Holy Communion do not inherently convey grace is also explained in the letters of John Wesley. The open letter to Roman Catholics which considers a catechism and provides a reply to each point explores this question of the grace conveyed through the sacrament. The Roman catechism teaches that “The sacraments contain the grace which they signify, and confer grace *ex opere operato*, ‘by the work itself,’ upon such as do not put an obstruction.”<sup>288</sup> The reply to this is twofold:

It is not sufficient that adult persons have no indisposition to receive the grace of the sacraments; for there is also required a mind-well instructed, a sound belief, and a heart well inclined for that purpose. (2). The virtue in the sacraments doth not proceed from the mere elements and words, but from the blessing of God in consequence of his promise to such only as rightly partake of them, and are qualified for it.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Wesley, *Christian Sacrament*, HLS, 14.

<sup>288</sup> John Wesley, “A Roman Catechism” n.p., *The Works of John Wesley: The Jackson Edition*, vol 10. *Letters and Essays, on CD-ROM*. Abingdon Press, 2005.

<sup>289</sup> John Wesley, “A Roman Catechism” n.p., *The Works of John Wesley: The Jackson Edition*, vol 10. *Letters and Essays, on CD-ROM*. Abingdon Press, 2005.

The virtue and grace conveyed through the sacrament is not based on any inherent power that the elements may contain, but rather a heart ready to receive the grace of God is required. Ultimately, however, the grace received through the sacraments is due to the blessings of God promised to those who obey the command.

In answering the critics of spiritual exercises like Scripture, fasting, prayer and sacrament, John explores their arguments. He allows that "...the whole value of the means depends on their actual subservience to the end of religion; that consequently all these means, when separate from the end, are less than nothing and vanity; if they do not actually conduce to the knowledge and love of God they are not acceptable in his sight."<sup>290</sup> This he calls an abomination before God and a stench in God's nostrils. The "end of religion" referred to in the above quotation is what Wesley would frequently describe as a holiness of heart and life. This is a "knowledge and love of God" and of course a love for neighbour.<sup>291</sup> Likewise without the Spirit of God, all the means of grace are worthless. One point he emphasizes is that there is no intrinsic power in these things. He acknowledges, with his critics, that some abuse the means of grace, assuming by their use of them that they are Christians, or that "there is some sort of *merit* in using them, which will surely move God to give them holiness or accept them without it."<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> WJW, vol 1, 381.

<sup>291</sup> For an example of Wesley's use of the term 'holiness of heart and life' see the sermon *The Law Established Through Faith, discourse II*, from WJW, vol. 2, 38. See also the sermon *Catholic Spirit*, from WJW, vol. 2, 81-95 for a discussion on the love for God and neighbour as exemplifying the goal of the Christian faith.

<sup>292</sup> WJW, vol 1, 383.

One other argument that people might raise against the means of grace is that Christ alone is the sole grounds for the atonement. Here Wesley agrees:

We allow farther that the use of all means whatever will never atone for one sin; that it is the blood of Christ alone whereby any sinner can be reconciled to God; that there being no other propitiation for our sins, no other fountain for sin and uncleanness. Every believer in Christ is deeply convinced that there is no *merit* but in him; that there is no *merit* in any of his own works; not in uttering the prayer, or searching the Scripture, or hearing the Word of God, or eating of that bread and drinking of that cup; so that if no more be intended by the expression some have used, ‘Christ is the only means of grace,’ than this – that he is the only *meritorious cause* of it, -- it cannot be gainsaid by any who know the grace of God.<sup>293</sup>

Christ is the only means of grace. The instituted “means of grace” do not inherently supply the grace of God because the grace of God comes from Christ. Since Christ has ordained and instituted certain means of ‘obtaining his help,’ such as Scripture, sacrament and prayer, these means of grace have no inherent power but do convey grace by the work of the Holy Spirit and the promises of Christ. In his conclusion to this message he states, “Settle this in your heart, that the *opus operatum*, the mere work done, profiteth nothing; that there is no *power* to save but in the Spirit of God, no *merit*, but in the blood of Christ; that consequently even what God ordains conveys no grace to the soul if you trust not in him alone.”<sup>294</sup> The conclusion and emphasis of the entire message is to use the means as ordained, for their end in producing holiness of heart and life, “not for their own sake, but in order to the renewal of your soul in righteousness and true holiness.”<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> WJW, vol. 1. 382-383.

<sup>294</sup> WJW, vol 1. 396.

<sup>295</sup> WJW, vol 1. 396-397.

Likewise, through all the imagery and vocabulary of the atonement that has been presented in this hymnal, the theology of the Lord's Supper is consistent with the teaching on the means of grace. There is no other propitiation for the sins of humanity than the work of Christ. Whether it is through the imagery of bread and wine, or the language of covenant, the focus on the atonement is central to the sacrament. The introduction to the hymnal asks:

Ought not then one who looks on these Ordinances, and considers the Great and dreadful Passages which they set before him, to say in his Heart, I observe on this Altar somewhat very like the Sacrifice of my Saviour. For thus the *Bread of Life* was broken; thus the *Lamb of God* was slain, and his *Blood* shed. And when I look on the Minister, who by special Order from God, distributes this Bread and Wine, I conceive, That thus God himself hath both given his Son to die, and gives us still the Virtue of his Death.<sup>296</sup>

The hymnal is then filled with lines such as "O my God, He dies for me,"<sup>297</sup> "He bears my Sins on yonder Tree, / And pays my Debt in Blood"<sup>298</sup> and hymn number 24 that begins "Expiring in the Sinner's Place."<sup>299</sup> All of these examples describe the propitiatory aspect of the atonement. Again the sermons and the hymnal are thoroughly consistent.

The theology of the atonement is essential to evangelical and Protestant doctrine. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper emphasizes this doctrine, and the hymnal teaches about the atonement. In *The Duty of Constant Communion, The Means of Grace*, and in the hymnal, those who avoid the sacrament of the Lord's Supper are regarded with suspicion and even contempt for both disobeying the

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<sup>296</sup> Wesley, *Christian Sacrament, HLS*, 6.

<sup>297</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 17.

<sup>298</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 3.

<sup>299</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 19.

plain command of Christ and rejecting the mercy of God. In *The Duty of Constant Communion*, John uses the example of the early church:

...like the first Christians, with whom the Christian sacrifice was a constant part of the Lord's day's service. And for several centuries they received it almost every day. Four times a week always, and every saint's day beside. Accordingly those that joined in the prayers of the faithful never failed to partake of the blessed sacrament. What opinion they had of any who turned his back upon it we may learn from that ancient canon, 'If any believer join in the prayers of the faithful, and go away without receiving the Lord's Supper, let him be excommunicated, as bringing confusion into the church of God.'<sup>300</sup>

The Canon John quotes from is the Cannon II of the Dedication Council of Antioch, from A.D. 341. The introduction to the sermon *The Means of Grace* makes the same point. The question of whether or not there are means of grace was a question and an issue confronting and dividing the Methodist societies, but not one the early church would have asked:

This question could never have been proposed in the apostolic church unless by one who openly avowed himself to be a heathen, the whole body of Christians being agreed that Christ had ordained certain outward means for conveying his grace into the souls of men. Their constant practice set this beyond dispute; for so long as 'all that believed were together, and had all things in common,' 'they continued steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.'<sup>301</sup>

The hymnal concludes on this very point, that constant communion was a practice of the early church. The epic 22 stanza hymn that closes the hymnal begins with a look at the early church. Stanza 2 refers to their daily obedience to the commandment, just as both sermons argued for the practice of constant Communion. The early church was "impregnated with the life of God" (stanza 4 line 2) and "They liv'd on Earth like those above, / Glad Rivals of the heavenly

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<sup>300</sup> WJW, vol. 3, 430.

<sup>301</sup> WJW, vol. 1, 378.

Choir.”<sup>302</sup> The sad condition of the Church of Wesley’s day prompts the questions, “Why is the faithful Seed decreas’d? / The Life of God extinct and dead?”<sup>303</sup> The answer, not surprisingly, is because the sacrament is neglected:

The daily Sacrifice is ceas’d  
And Charity to Heaven is fled.

Sad mutual Causes of Decay  
Slackness and Vice together move,  
Grown cold we cast the Means away,  
And quench’d our latest Spark of Love.<sup>304</sup>

The hymnal and the two relevant sermons are once again in agreement. They show the importance of constant communion by the example of the early church, and by contrast with the neglect of the sacrament in the contemporary church. The neglect of the Lord’s Supper reflects a coldness that actually extinguishes our love for Christ. The hymn refers to the cause of decay as slackness and vice and therefore to neglect the Lord’s Supper is not only slothful but vicious and ultimately demonic. Since the *daily* sacrifice ceased, the hymn laments that Charity has fled to heaven. The latest spark of love is quenched and therefore the “end of religion” is lost. Both a love for God and love for neighbour are impossible without constant communion because people have “Grown cold and cast the means away.” A further stanza laments:

Thine holy Ordinance contemn’d  
Hath let the Flood of Evil in,  
And those who by the Name are nam’d,  
The Sinners unbaptiz’d out-sin.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 139.

<sup>303</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 140.

<sup>304</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 140.

<sup>305</sup> Wesley, *HLS*, 140.

Sloth and vice are the cause of neglecting the sacrament, and in this stanza the sacraments and means of grace are condemned thus allowing a “flood of Evil in.” Neglect of the sacrament leads to the quenching of a love for God and neighbour and the results are disastrous. Those who refer to themselves as a Christian and thereby claim the name of Christ as their own, neglect the sacrament and as a result they “out-sin” the heathen and *unbaptized* sinners.

Charles Wesley composed a manuscript exploring Acts 20:7, a verse that says the disciples gathered on the first day of the week to break bread. Very early in the sermon Charles laments the “...speculative reasonings of the school-men and the tyrannical impositions of the popes of Rome” creating the “...monster of transubstan[tia]tion....”<sup>306</sup> It has already been shown how the Eucharistic hymnal is adamantly opposed to the doctrine of transubstantiation. The Book of Common Prayer shares this opposition to transubstantiation. This is yet another example of where the theology remains consistent between the sermons and the hymnal. The tract also laments the “scandalous infrequency”<sup>307</sup> of the Lord’s Supper, and once again the hymnal coincides with the sermon where anything less than constant communion is inexcusable. In fact Charles goes as far to say the “non-necessity of constant Communion”<sup>308</sup> is equally as offensive, defective and ultimately heretical as the doctrine of transubstantiation. The ‘non-necessity’ of the Lord’s Supper is considered heretical because it is both a blatant act of disobedience and

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<sup>306</sup> Kenneth G.C. Newport. *The Sermons of Charles Wesley*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 281.

<sup>307</sup> Kenneth G.C. Newport. *The Sermons of Charles Wesley*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 281.

<sup>308</sup> Kenneth G.C. Newport. *The Sermons of Charles Wesley*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 281.

a feeble attempt to improve on the apostolic witness. The message explores the Biblical and apostolic witness regarding constant communion and then considers the situation of the eighteenth century.

After referring to his introductory verse from Acts 20:7, Charles challenges anyone to produce a single Biblical example where the community of believers gathers after Pentecost and worships without breaking bread. To the contrary Charles says that the evidence supports the Lord's Supper being celebrated on every Lord's Day. In addition to the Biblical witness, Charles considers the witness of the early church. The first source he uses is Justin the Martyr who lived early in the apostolic age. Justin says before the senate at Rome that the community of believers gathers on Sunday to hear readings from the apostles or prophets. A sermon is delivered, followed by prayer, and then the distribution of bread and wine to all who are present and even to those who are absent. After considering this quotation Charles says, "...that he must be allowed to be a credible evidence of this matter of fact, that the apostolic Churches, the principal of which he had personally been present in, did constantly celebrate the Eucharist every Lord's Day."<sup>309</sup> This testimony, says Charles, is presented to the Senate in Rome, and therefore speaks for the entire Christian community of that day and age.

The second early church source used to support the practice of constant Communion is Pliny the younger. Charles admits that this is a "heathen writer" but as such this source provides an unbiased and stronger argument. The report

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<sup>309</sup> Kenneth G.C. Newport. *The Sermons of Charles Wesley*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 284.

that Pliny gives to his master regarding Christian behaviour states that the Church would meet on a stated day for the sacrament.

The third source is *The Apostolic Constitution*, although Charles does not hesitate to recognize that this is not an original source by the apostles themselves. This is yet another early church source which says the Eucharist is celebrated every Sunday. After listing and explaining this source, Charles asks a poignant question: “whether these Constitutions are not ancient enough to determine whether the Church thought herself obliged to offer the Eucharist on the Lord’s Day or no.”<sup>310</sup> His conclusion is quite simple:

We have the testimony of S. Luke in several passages of his Acts of the Apostle, of S. Paul in his first Epistle to Corinth, of Tertullian S. Justin the Martyr, the Apostolic Constitutions, and lastly of the Roman Pliny to prove that the holy Eucharist is to be celebrated every Lord’s Day at the least. More authorities might have been added, both from the ancient fathers and from the oracles of God, but these, I think, are abundantly sufficient to prove what I undertook, namely, that both scripture and tradition do give plain evidence for the necessity of making at best a weekly oblation of the Christian sacrifice, and of honouring every Lord’s Day with a solemn public celebration of the Lord’s Supper.<sup>311</sup>

This message is consistent both with the two sermons by John and the Eucharistic hymnal. It is interesting to note that this concluding paragraph emphasizes the necessity of a weekly sacrament, just as John refers to a “Duty of Constant Communion.” Given the “scandalous infrequency” and the “non-necessity” of constant Communion, Charles says the evidence he presents supports “...the necessity of making at best a weekly oblation of the Christian sacrifice, and of honouring every Lord’s Day with a solemn public celebration of the Lord’s

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<sup>310</sup> Kenneth G.C. Newport. *The Sermons of Charles Wesley*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 286.

<sup>311</sup> Kenneth G.C. Newport. *The Sermons of Charles Wesley*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 286.

Supper.” Upon further reflection of this concluding paragraph one comes to the startling realization that this “at best” situation is in fact the “least” that should be done. The Biblical account, and the support of the early Church, proves “the holy Eucharist is to be celebrated every Lord’s Day *at the least*” (emphasis added). If the celebration of the Lord’s Supper every Sunday is in fact the least that should be done, one is left to ask what could be more frequent? The answer is simple and is found in the concluding hymn in the Eucharistic hymnal. The example of the early Church, as celebrated in hymn 166, has the followers of Christ receiving the Lord’s Supper daily, and not only on each Sunday. That hymn concludes with a prayer that the Lord would restore to the Church the “daily sacrifice.” Both of the sermons of John and that of Charles not only agree with each other but are consistent with the theology presented in the Eucharistic hymnal. The Biblical and early Church evidence supports the necessity of constant Communion.

### **Conclusion:**

As previously mentioned the epic twenty-two stanza hymn that closes the hymnal presents the Lord’s Supper as a catalyst for revival. The hymn begins with a celebration of the virtue of the early church. The holiness they exhibited was due to their practice of a daily “sacrifice.” The hymn then laments the sad condition of the church during the age of John and Charles Wesley. And the conclusion of the hymn is a prayer and petition that God would restore the daily sacrifice. It is a surprising request especially when one considers denominations of this present age which have a weekly sacrament and yet appear to be in decline. Unlike this Wesleyan hymnal, contemporary evangelical theology does not celebrate such a high view of the sacrament or consider it to be a catalyst for revival. The Free Methodist hymnal from 1915 has seven hymns on the Lord’s Supper, but only one of the seven is from the collection *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*, and the remainder were not written by John or Charles Wesley. By 1989 the Free Methodist hymnal contained only two hymns for Holy Communion, and neither comes from the pen of the Wesley’s.

In the introduction to the hymnal the lament is expressed that “Too many who are call’d Christians live as if under the Gospel there were no Sacrifice but that of Christ on the Cross.”<sup>312</sup> This lament begins the section on the Eucharist as it implies a sacrifice of ourselves. To receive the Lord’s Supper is a call to be committed to the cause of Christ. Hence the Methodist societies organized by the Wesleys practiced ‘constant communion,’ and such ‘constancy’ prompted the writing of a hymnal for the Lord’s Supper.

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<sup>312</sup> Wesley, *Christian Sacrament*, HLS, 23.

This hymnal uses imagery and vocabulary related to the sacrament and the poetry throughout the hymnal, from cover to cover, describes the theology of the atonement. Whether it is the imagery of bread and wine, or the vocabulary of covenant and ransom, the atonement is central to the theology of this hymnal. J. Ernest Rattenbury's work, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns*, has a chapter on "The Wesleys' doctrine of the atonement and the modern mind." In that chapter he writes, "While it is right, perhaps desirable, to discuss the doctrine of Atonement, which was never formulated as a standard dogma of Methodism, it must always be remembered that a rejection of its substance would imply the end of the evangelical system of theology."<sup>313</sup> Daniel Stevick has noted that, "one cannot understand the sacrament adequately without seeking to understand the atonement, and one cannot understand the atonement profoundly apart from the sacrament and the sacramental community .... Yet studies of the atonement continue to be produced which see no need to mention the sacraments, and many studies of the sacraments run through the work of Christ as though it were a known preliminary."<sup>314</sup> Evangelical theology is entirely dependent upon the theology of the atonement, and here in this hymnal it is constantly described through every poetic image and reference to the Lord's Supper. The atonement is the pre-eminent theme of this collection of hymns, and therefore the Evangelical church should be the champions of this sacrament and practice.

Many of the hymns in this collection are still accessible to a contemporary congregation, and if new melodies are matched to the rhythm of a hymn, new life

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<sup>313</sup> Rattenbury, *Evangelical Doctrines*, 204.

<sup>314</sup> Daniel B. Stevick, "The Altar and the Cross" *Proceedings of the Charles Wesley Society* vol. 5 (1998): 80.

can be breathed into these long lost Methodist treasures. The introduction to the hymnal describes the theology and content of the hymnal, and each section concludes with a prayer. These prayers can also be adapted for contemporary congregations observing the Lord's Supper. To conclude this thesis work I present one of these pastoral prayers found in the introduction to *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*. This hymn is Trinitarian in its theology with references to the Father, Son and Spirit. There is in this prayer a reference to the Son describing the ministry he fulfills as High Priest. It is a prayer that confesses the unworthiness of the recipient as one being filled with death (figured by dust and ashes), wants, weaknesses and distress. It is also a confession of faith, faith that the sacrament will truly provide the blessings of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. And the conclusion to the prayer is that the world, the church and the individual will be blessed by the help of God's Mercy presented in the Lord's Supper. This brief prayer also contains the one theme of the hymnal. The atonement, of course, is present in this prayer with the reference to the Sacrifice of Christ "once offered for my sins." This prayer is presented in the introduction to the hymnal, and is a reflection of the theology contained therein:

O Lord, who seest nothing in me, that is truly mine, but sinful Dust and Ashes, look upon the Sacrifice of thy dear Son, once offered for my Sins. Turn thine eyes, O merciful Father, to the Satisfaction and Intercession of my Lord, who now sits at thy right Hand; to the Seals of thy Covenant, which lie before thee upon this Table; and to all the Wants, Weaknesses, and Distresses, which Thou seest in my Heart. O Father, glorify thy Son; O Son of God, bless thou thine Ordinance, and send with it the Influence of that Spirit, whom Thou hast promised to all Flesh: That by the Help of these Mercies, the World, the Church and our Souls may glorify Thee now and ever.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> Wesley, *Christian Sacrament*, HLS, 22-23.

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