'Impassive He Suffers; Immortal He Dies': Rhetoric and Polemic in Charles Wesley's Portrayal of the Atonement

JAMES G. GORDON,
CROWN TERRACE BAPTIST CHURCH, ABERDEEN

'Wesley's themes... are the central paradoxes of the Christian faith. His favourite figure is oxymoron.'[1]

This observation by one of Wesley's most sympathetic critics is important not only for Wesley's poetics but also for his theological style and concerns. The major themes of Christian doctrine, fall and redemption, incarnation and atonement, sin and sanctification, divine love and human renewal, of earth-bound existence and the hope of heaven, give Charles Wesley's hymns an emotional intensity directly derived from what is at stake in the issues he deals with. Wesley exploits the fact that the basic doctrines of Christian faith are paradoxical. Oxymoron allows Wesley to push paradox to the limit, and so to express truth in language stripped down to the bare essentials of radical contradiction: Jesus as the human face of God, the eternal Word becoming time-bound flesh, eternal life mediated through death, divine power revealed through suffering love, God's strength made perfect through weakness.

These and other aspects of Christian faith were encapsulated in phrases deliberately crafted to sharpen the focus of truth. 'T'is mystery all! Th' Immortal dies', begins a verse which is a theological defence of being content with not knowing, the glad agnosticism of those who cannot explain God's strange design, and who refuse to sound the depths of love divine since such a piece of sacred impertinence gives even the angels

---

[1] Donald Davie, *Purity of Diction in English Verse* (London, 1952), p. 79. Other still important treatments of Wesley's poetic style and use of vocabulary include, B.L. Manning, *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts* (London, 1948). O. Beckerlegge, 'Charles Wesley's Vocabulary', *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* 193 (1968), pp. 152-61. F. Baker, *Charles Wesley's Verse. An Introduction* (London, Second ed. 1988), pp. 42-4. Davie returned to Wesley's hymns in *The Eighteenth-Century Hymn in England* (Cambridge 1993), pp. 57-70.

pause. 'Th' Immortal dies' and what is required is not explanation but adoration. One of the Nativity Hymns demonstrates Wesley's facility with these radical contrasts which give oxymoron rhetorical force. At Christ's birth 'God the invisible appears', 'Being's source begins to be, And God himself is born!'

The self-abnegation of God, and the surrender of position and privilege for the sake of others, provide the driving thought. But it is the sense of wonder and awed astonishment that Wesley captures and conveys to the singer by expressing a truth that makes no human sense, and which defies all the normal canons of logic. Elsewhere Wesley muses on a less exalted doctrinal plane. 'I want a calmly fervent zeal'. To be busy without being harassed, to be relaxed without being complacent, to have the adrenaline without the anxiety. Oxymoron communicates well the subtle precision of everyday spiritual yearnings held in a balanced tension. It is a device Wesley habitually used as a lens to sharpen the focus of theological reflection.

Wesley's eucharistic hymn, 'Victim Divine', has several examples of oxymoron as sharpened focus, including the title itself.[2] Concentration on the 'precious death' of Christ on the cross is immediately forced on the reader by the non-sense of almighty God victimised. The concept of victim presupposes one who experiences weakness and on whom suffering or loss is inflicted. By contrast, the adjective 'divine' presupposes unprecedented power and an eternal self-sufficiency which transcends need. 'Victim Divine' becomes then a contradiction of reality as we know it. The rhetorical potency of Wesley's phrase captures the tragedy and glory of the passion of God.

Victim Divine, thy grace we claim
While thus thy precious death we show;
Once offer'd up, a spotless Lamb,
In thy great temple here below,
Thou didst for all mankind atone,
And standest now before the throne.

The smoke of thy atonement here
Darkened the sun and rent the veil.
Made the new way to heaven appear,
And show the great Invisible;

---

[2] Frank Whaling (ed.), *John and Charles Wesley: Selected Writings and Hymns* (London, 1981), p. 265.

Well pleased in thee our God looked down,
And call'd his rebels to a crown.[3]

The incarnation of Christ is presented as an act of astounding condescension which Wesley often portrayed by impossible imagery, created by linking conflicting opposites. The death of Christ acts like a lens through which 'th' Invisible' is fully displayed. The Old Testament atmosphere of smoke, blood and sacrifice are applied in the hymn, not so much to the crucifixion of Jesus told as a story, but to the atonement as an historic event of eternal significance, the effects of which linger on in the created order with aromatic intensity. Smoke and perfume are detected by smell, one of the most powerful triggers of memory and recall. 'The offering smokes through earth and skies, / Diffusing life and joy and peace.' Earth is the temple where the altar is positioned and on which the sacrificial victim is laid, but the holy of holies is in heaven, and though Christ died here, the impact of his death is eternally felt there.

It is as if Wesley is constructing a cosmology shaped by the believer's experience of the cross, so that his universe takes on a crucicentric shape. The gulf between earth and heaven is emphasised, and Christ's descent is described, not as incarnation, but in the paradox of one whose descent is an offering up. Skipping the resurrection Wesley passes straight to the vision of Christ standing before the Father, having made for 'helpless man', 'a new way to heaven appear'. The effect of the once-for-all atonement on the inner realities of Godhead are shown to have eternal consequences for sinners. The new way to heaven is opened, God is pleased, and invites rebels to become not only loyal subjects but crown princes of the kingdom of God. The atonement permeates the universe as smoke that covers sin, as perfume that expresses life and joy and peace on earth. Bloody sacrifice has become cosmic blessing.

Thou standest in the holiest place,
As now for guilty sinners slain;
Thy blood of sprinkling speaks, and prays,
All-prevalent for helpless man;
Thy blood is still our ransom found,
And spreads salvation all around.[4]

The efficacy of the atonement is linked to the intercession of Christ, the advocate with the Father. But in this hymn there are no speeches for

[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*

the defence, no advocate's carefully crafted sentences. What is all prevalent is not the advocate's words, but the advocate's person and presence, his personal suffering exhibited through the physical visible evidence of blood. The blood is not only a symbol for sacrifice but a God-persuading argument which is 'all-prevalent for helpless man'.

The hymn rehearses the great moment of Christian salvation in Wesley's atonement theology, leaving the incarnation and resurrection in the background for the sake of concentrating the reader on the central paradox of the Victim Divine, once crucified and now continually pleading an eternal argument in heaven. The argued atonement brings benediction to earth and wafts throughout a fallen world, giving hints of divine redemption, like lingering perfume which betrays a significant presence.

But Wesley is not content with a remote Saviour, or a merely transactional basis for fellowship with the divine. Christ is now available to every faith-full soul:

> We need not now go up to heaven,
> To bring the long-sought Saviour down;
> Thou art to all already given,
> Thou dost even now thy banquet crown:
> To every faithful soul appear,
> And show thy real presence here![5]

The real presence is not confined to heaven, nor even to the Eucharist. Christ in all the fullness of divine love is already given, transparently present to faithful souls, though never more apparent than in the banquet of the Lord's Supper. Though Wesley confesses the once-for-all-ness of Christ's sacrifice, his eucharistic theology is rich in sensual references, which are almost the equivalent of a spiritual empiricism. Appeals to taste, sight, hearing, touching and tasting re-present to the believing communicant the reality of the crucifixion. One example shows Wesley's daring denial that the supper is primarily memorial. The speaker urges the singer to 'behold', to 'see', to 'open faith's interior eye'[6]:

> In this authentic sign
> Behold the stamp Divine:
> Christ revives his suffering here,
> Still exposes them to view;

---

5 *Ibid.*

6 Whaling, *John and Charles Wesley*, p. 231.

See the Crucified appear,
Now believe he died for you.[7]

For all my Lord was crucified, For all, for all my Saviour died.

The line, 'Thou art to all already given' contains one of Wesley's most remarkably consistent rhetorical nudges. 'All' is one of Wesley's polemical icons. By his remorseless use of this absolutely inclusive word, Charles chipped away at the foundations of Calvinistic teaching, in particular the doctrines of predestination and limited atonement. The Wesleys quarrelled with Calvinists intermittently from 1739 when Wesley published his sermon 'Free Grace', to the controversy in the 1770s with Augustus Toplady and from 1778 onwards through the defiantly entitled *Arminian Magazine*. Wesley's 1739 sermon provoked a spirited and carefully measured reply from George Whitefield when he returned from the North American colonies in 1741. In Whitefield's letter to Wesley, preserved in his *Journals*, he dealt with some of Wesley's most damaging criticisms, and pointed out, rightly, that in his doctrine he followed the Thirty Nine Articles.[8] While Whitefield tried to present a reasonable case for Calvinism, he satisfied neither Wesley nor the hyper-Calvinists who felt Whitefield came close to making crucial concessions and spoke with an 'Arminian accent'.[9]

The resulting split between the Wesleys and Whitefield was only one eruption of a theological controversy that rumbled on for decades, occasionally erupting in damaging personal attack and polemical caricature. 'The existential pressures of the experience of grace, as well as inherited or acquired theological tenets, ensured that the Calvinist controversy would be a running sore in the bowels of the Revival as well as a source of pain for individuals.'[10] Some of Charles Wesley's hymns, published in the 1740s contributed considerably to Calvinists' experience of that pain, while at the same time articulating and developing emphases that would give decisive shape and distinctiveness to Wesleyan theology.

---

7 *Ibid.*

8 Iain Murray (ed.), *George Whitefield's Journals*, (Edinburgh 1960) pp. 569-88.

9 Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast. John Wesley and the Rise of Methodists* (London, 1989) pp. 200-201.

10 Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 202.

Fundamental to that theology is the contention that universal salvation and a universal gospel presuppose a love without limits and thus an atonement without limits. The hymn 'Come sinners to the gospel feast', published in 1747 when some of the heat had died down, shows Charles appealing for a response of faith in Billy Graham mode:

> Come sinners to the Gospel Feast;
> Let every soul be Jesus' Guest;
> Ye need not one be left behind,
> For GOD hath bidden All Mankind.[11]

'Every soul' – therefore there can be no predetermined exclusions. The negative possibilities are shown to have nothing inevitable about them since 'Ye need not one be left behind'. This is not theology out of control; it is theology redrawing the scope of Divine grace and the boundaries of Divine love, reminiscent of the Lucan parable of the Great Banquet.[12] By the time Wesley appeals to 'all the souls by sin oppressed' he has moved to a clear articulation of just what it is God is about in preparing the gospel feast.

> Ye vagrant Souls, on You I call,
> (O that my Voice could reach you all!)
> Ye all are freely Justified,
> Ye all may live – for God[13] hath died.
>
> His Love is mighty to compel;
> His Conqu'ring Love consent to feel,
> Yield to His Love's resistless power,
> And fight against your God no more.[14]

That last stanza is a robust recasting of divine sovereignty in which the defining idea is love rather than power, and grace rather than judgement. Irresistible grace is no longer an expression of unconditional and eternally

---

[11] Whaling, *John and Charles Wesley*, p. 251.

[12] Teresa Berger, *Theology in Hymns*, (Nashville 1995), pp. 109-15, considers more fully Wesley's balance of the universal 'for all' with the particular 'for me' in Wesley's hymns.

[13] Original Mss version. Changed to 'Christ hath died' in the 1747 and 1780 published versions.

[14] Whaling, *John and Charles Wesley*, p. 251.

decreed election, but of infinitely costly love which, to Wesley's mind, is compellingly persuasive without being manipulatively coercive.[15]

By widespread and deliberately provocative use of 'all' Wesley makes the widest possible claims on behalf of the grace of God. He had no fears of the spiritual trades description officials censuring him for misleading the market. Christ died for *all*; the blood of Christ is sufficient to remove *all* sin; through Jesus believers can know *all* the blessings of God and in Jesus God gives *all* that renewed human nature can contain.

Great God of universal love

In a hymn of praise to God (and theological conversation with the singer), Wesley expounds the gospel without limits with vigorous wonder.

> Come let us join our friends above,
> The God of our salvation praise,
> The God of everlasting love,
> The God of universal grace.

Before long he is using that inclusive absolute again:

> This is the ground of all our hope,
> The fountain this of all our good,
> Jesus for all was lifted up,
> And shed for all His precious blood.
>
> Thou drawest all men unto Thee,
> Grace doth to every soul appear;
> Preventing grace for all is free,
> And brings to all salvation near.[16]

Grace is irresistible, but only in the sense that God's love is mercifully patient in judgement, (Thou wouldst not shut Thy mercy's door), endlessly inventive in strategy, (Thy grace suggests our first good thought/ thy only grace doth all inspire), and persistently patient in mercy:

---

[15] 'Wesley's soteriological universalism is limited to God's invitation to salvation alone. Nowhere is it indicated that the acceptance of salvation is or will be universal.' Berger, *Theology in Hymns*, p. 112. This observation is crucial when considering Charles' polemical defence of a universal gospel.

[16] Tyson, *Charles Wesley. A Reader*, pp. 306-9.

When twice ten thousand times we fell,
Thou gav'st us still a longer space,
Didst freely our backslidings heal,
And show'dst Thy more abundant grace.[17]

Only one letter distinguishes heal from Hell, and coming at the end of a line, in which we anticipate an obvious and frequent Wesleyan rhyme, it is slyly effective in forcing the reader into a theological and emotional re-orientation. The theme of the entire hymn is grace, and deserved judgement, yet Wesley manages to weave in thirty-five occurrences of 'all' as a code-word to show that God is determined, even pre-determined to be as patiently generous and merciful as human intransigence will allow.

Charles refused to allow Calvinists to make the sovereignty of God a registered trademark. In the verse that immediately follows, he does mention Hell, perhaps to suggest that God's preferred response to sin is not Hell[18] but grace.

Twas grace from Hell that brought us up;
Lo! to Thy sovereign grace we bow,
Through sovereign grace we still have hope,
Thy sovereign grace supports us now.[19]

Wesley is unworried by the monotony of repetition. Grace restrains sin, raises from the death of sin, draws to salvation, so that the surrendered soul declares, 'The monuments of thy grace we stand, / Thy free, thine universal grace.' Within the scope of the divine grace, sovereign in generosity and in the freedom of love, the entire life of each human being is included:

By grace we draw our every breath;
By grace we live, and move and are;
By grace we 'scape the second death;
By grace we now thy grace declare.[20]

---

17 Tyson, *Charles Wesley. A Reader*, pp. 307-8.

18 Not that Charles was an eighteenth-century annihilationist. He held a strong doctrine of Hell and eternal punishment. His quarrel was with a view of God which he believed made Hell an inevitable necessity for some, irrespective of human response, making human moral life an irrelevance.

19 Tyson, *Charles Wesley. A Reader*, p. 308

20 *Ibid.*

By this time Wesley's point is made. Grace is sovereign and free, universal and entirely gift. But Charles was never one to stop fighting just because an opponent was beaten. He uses the hymn to celebrate free grace, and spell out the sufficiency of that grace because it is grace as eternal love bearing sin[21] that is definitive in the eternal salvific purposes of God.

> He promised all mankind to draw;
> We feel Him draw us from above,
> And preach with Him the gracious law,
> And publish the DECREE OF LOVE.[22]

There is probably both mischief and humour in that last line, where once again Wesley steals back some of the trade-mark terminology of his Calvinist opponents.

Everlasting love and free grace undergird a universal gospel. These convictions lay at the very heart of the Wesleyan understanding of the revival. For the Wesleys any limiting of the scope of the atonement to accommodate theological presuppositions, Calvinist or otherwise, was a subversion of their message, and a slander on the eternal purposes of God. The predestinarian decree as the basis for a limited atonement and unconditional election was in Wesley's view a perverse abstraction. It was misleading to preachers of the gospel, obstructive and offensive to hearers, and a misrepresentation of the fundamental truth about God as revealed in the crucified Christ.

We think that fury is in Thee, Horribly think, that God is hate.

Charles' passionate opposition to what he saw as Calvinist hard-line restrictiveness was voiced in sermons and hymns and is recorded in his journal for the 1740s. In June 1741, while Howel Harris the Welsh evangelist was preaching on irresistible grace, he was interrupted by Charles singing his own polemical variation on the doxology:

> Praise God from whom pure blessings flow,
> Whose bowels yearn on all below;
> Who would not see one sinner lost;
> Praise Father Son and Holy Ghost.[23]

---

[21] James Denney, quoted in J. Taylor, *God Loves Like That*, (London, 1962), p. 78.

[22] Tyson, *Charles Wesley. A Reader*, p. 309.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 294.

A month later, still in Wales 'contending against Calvinism', Charles varied his tactics. 'Preached to the society and a few others, chiefly predestinarians. Without touching the dispute, I simply declared the scriptural marks of election; whereby some, I believe, were cut off from their vain confidence. The sincere ones clave to me. Who can resist the power of love? A loving messenger of a loving God might drive reprobation out of Wales, without even naming it...'.[24]

During that same year, 1741, a collection of Charles' hymns was published entitled, *Hymns on God's Everlasting Love, To Which is Added the 'Cry of a Reprobate', and 'The Horrible Decree'*.[25] These hymns, peppered with italics and words in capital letters, contain lines and phrases honed and set to cut and wound his opponents. Satire turned to scathing sarcasm and then to outright fury in a poem hard to classify as a hymn, so intense are the human emotions of anger, scorn and hatred, if not of others, then of their ideas. 'The Horrible Decree' is a complex product of Charles' psychological sensitivity, of eighteenth-century theological controversy, Augustan rhetorical style, Revivalist passion encountering ridicule and hostility and not least of religious experience redefining theology. Crude ridicule and relentless mockery are the weapons of a poem which is a tour de force, a reductio ad absurdum, a comprehensive hatchet-job, the premeditated murder of an idea.

Ah! Gentle, gracious Dove;
And art Thou grieved in me,
That sinners should restrain Thy love,
And say, 'It is not free:
It is not free for *all;*
The *most* Thou *passest by*,
And mockest with a fruitless call
Whom Thou hast doom'd to die.'

They think Thee *not sincere*
In giving each his day:
'Thou only drawst the sinner near,
To cast him quite away;
To aggravate his sin,
His sure damnation seal,
Thou show'st him heaven, and say'st Go in –
And thrusts him into hell.'

---

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] *Ibid.*, ch. 8. All quotations from this hymn are from Tyson, pp. 303-6.

O HORRIBLE DECREE [26]
Worthy of whence it came!
Forgive their hellish blasphemy
Who charge it on the Lamb.

Further couplets display the fertile hostility of an outraged Arminian:

He offers grace to all,
Which most cannot embrace,
Mock'd with an ineffectual call
And insufficient grace.

These and further verses are liberally sprinkled with insults and caricature drawn from the full armoury of anti-Calvinist slogans about 'satanic sophistry', the damnation of infants outside God's elect, poor reprobates 'forced into hell', not damned just decreed 'never to be saved'. Finally the hymn changes tone following a prayer that envisages 'The devil and his doctrine cast / Into the burning pit.' Thereafter Wesley pleads with God, 'Defend Thy mercy's cause', and 'Vindicate Thy grace.' The last two verses express Wesley's personal prayer of commitment to the universal gospel, and are worth quoting in full for their combination of theological passion and rhetorical power:

My life I here present,
My heart's last drop of blood:
O let it all be freely spent
In proof that Thou art good:
Art good to all who breathe,
Who all may pardon have;
Thou willest not the sinner's death,
But all the world *wouldst* save.

O take me at my word;
But arm me with Thy power,
Then call me forth to suffer, Lord,
To meet the fiery hour:
In death I will proclaim
That all *may* hear Thy call,

[26] See Horton Davies, 'Charles Wesley and the Calvinist Tradition', in S. T. Kimbrough, Jr (ed.), *Charles Wesley: Poet and Theologian*, (Nashville, 1992), for further examples of anti-Calvinist hymnology.

And clap my hands amidst the flame,
And shout – HE DIED FOR ALL.[27]

Charles portrays himself a willing martyr for truth, and finishes with four words that represent the distilled essence of the universal gospel. So this hymn is a bit more than a theological temper tantrum. It is a carefully crafted assault weapon, polemic in the service of evangelism and rhetorical theology giving as good as it gets.

It is important to be aware that both Wesleys accepted the doctrine of election, but with significant qualifications. In the thought of the Wesleys election is conditional and subordinate to divine foreknowledge. God's election does not cause sin or faith, it recognizes it. 'If one really believed that: The elect shall be saved, do what they will: The reprobate shall be damned, do what they can, the vital connection between God's gracious initiative and [human] response is severed.'[28] The result, so Wesley contended, was to subvert gospel holiness by removing human moral responsibility from the question of human eternal destiny. In addition, the Wesleys were concerned about the impact of double predestination and limited atonement on the Christian rendering of the nature of God. These two theological principles of Calvinism seemed to be incompatible with a belief in the universality of God's love and goodness, a truth Wesley was convinced had central place in New Testament soteriology. It was these negative aspects of predestination and limited atonement that made Calvinism the target of their wrath.[29]

Mercifully, 'The Horrible Decree' ends, not on notes of abusive sarcasm and wild caricature, but in a change of mood, as passionate opposition to perceived error gives way to a more constructive commitment to truth. Nevertheless, the last four words, capitalized of course, represent a shouted and defiant credo – 'HE DIED FOR ALL!' It is therefore a relief to find another hymn from the same collection expounding the sovereign everlasting love of God in less combative tones.

---

[27] Tyson, *Charles Wesley. A Reader*, p. 306.

[28] Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*, (Nashville, 1994), p. 57.

[29] Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, pp. 55-8. This is a good brief and nuanced discussion of the issues. See also T. C. Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity* (Grand Rapids, 1994), pp. 252-75. Oden examines the Wesleys' thought on grace and predestination using frequent primary quotations, and giving careful attention to the relationship between divine foreknowledge, election, grace and faith.

O all-redeeming Lord,
Thy kindness I record:
Me Thy kindness hath allured,
Call'd, and drawn me from above;
Sweetly I am thus assured
Of thy everlasting love.[30]

Nevertheless ultimate questions about God's intentions remain:

But is thy grace less free
For others than for me?
Lord I have not learned thee so.
Good to every man thou art,
Free as air thy mercies flow;
So I feel it in my heart.[31]

In this fine hymn Wesley prefers raptures of praise directed to God, to mockery of human opponents; affirmation has silenced defamation, at least for now. The heat is generated by the sovereign love and generous grace of God rather than by the theological aberrations and spiritual shortcomings of his Calvinistic opponents:

The world's Desire and Hope
For this was lifted up;
Lord, Thou didst hereby engage
To draw all men to Thee,
All in every place and age:
Grace for all mankind is free!

The Spirit of Thy love
With every soul hath strove;
Every fallen soul of man
May recover from his fall,
See the Lamb for sinners slain,
Feel that He hath died for all.[32]

The usual Wesleyan arguments are there: free grace, the Lamb slain, the Spirit of Divine Love, the universal call and of course the ubiquitous 'all'. The hymn then ends with a verse that jolts the reader out of any belief in

[30] Tyson, *Charles Wesley. A Reader*, pp. 302-3.
[31] *Ibid.*
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 303.

divine love as indulgent cosiness. That it is still possible to be lost, Charles Wesley never doubted. Judas the betrayer, Esau who was not chosen, Cain the cursed murderer are all judged and rejected by God, but not through any prior decision of God. Hell is self-chosen, but the atonement is all-sufficient as is the grace of God to redeem even them... if they would.

> Thou dost not mock our race
> With insufficient grace;
> Thou hast reprobated none,
> Thou from *Pharaoh's* blood art free;
> Thou didst once for all atone,
> *Judas, Esau, Cain* and me.[33]

The daring liberties Wesley takes with the biblical text can be breathtaking.[34] He includes himself in the gallery of hell-deserving sinners for whom the divine grace and Christ's atonement are sufficient, always providing the sinner's response is penitent faith. Wesley has chosen the worst-case scenarios from the Scriptures to illustrate the scope and extent of atonement. The eternal fate of Judas, Esau, and Cain is not known, but whatever their destiny, it was not fixed in eternity by divine decree irrespective of moral choice and action or individual response to Christ.

Wesley's use of paradox and oxymoron and the pervasive use of his favourite inclusive absolute 'all', provide many of his hymns with theological bite and polemical edge. His use of 'all' and its close synonym 'every', sometimes dictated the rhyming and content of entire stanzas so that poetic discipline and aesthetic judgement had to play second fiddle to theological effect. Applied positively to God's universal love, and negatively in denying any limit in the availability or sufficiency of the atonement, these inclusive absolutes became verbal icons, words through which something of the essential nature of God is glimpsed.

Many aspects of Wesley's theology of the divine love come together in a hymn, two verses of which illustrate neatly Wesley's use of oxymoron and the vocabulary of non-exclusion. Wesley paints a word picture of

---

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] See S.T. Kimbrough, 'Charles Wesley and Biblical Interpretation' in *Charles Wesley. Poet and Theologian,* pp. 106-36, for a full account of Wesley's unusual and productive approach to biblical hermeneutics. Some of his best verses are founded on 'powerful imagery [which] sometimes has little or nothing to do with the text'. p. 118.

Jesus' passion, and draws the reader into it as a bystander, but as a bystander personally addressed. Each is addressed because all are addressed:

> All ye that pass by,
> To Jesus draw nigh,
> To you is it nothing that Jesus should die?
> Your ransom and peace
> Your surety He is,
> Come see if there ever was sorrow like His.
>
> He answer'd for all
> O come at His call,
> And low at His cross with astonishment fall.
> But lift up your eyes
> At Jesus' cries
> Impassive He suffers, Immortal He dies.[35]

This is the cross as theatre, the crucifixion as spectacle, the love of God enacted, the mystery that lies at the heart of God revealed, yet hidden in the secret counsels of God, where impossible truth is declared to be saving truth:

> Impassive He suffers, Immortal He dies.

[35] Tyson, *Charles Wesley. A Reader*, p. 231.