

**ONYENALI: 'At the Name of Jesus every Knee should Bow' (Phil. 2:10): A Call to Liturgical Gesture or Ethical Reformation?**

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**'AT THE NAME OF JESUS EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW' (PHIL. 2:10): A CALL TO LITURGICAL GESTURE OR ETHICAL REFORMATION?**

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**Abstract**

*It could be argued that Phil 2:10–11 is the high point of the ancient Christological hymn, which is contained in Phil 2:5–11. As the apex of this hymn, it embodies the essence of the entire hymn. These two verses conclude the argument of the pericope by recording that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth. The name of Jesus is also the entity at which every tongue shall confess the Lordship of Jesus. What is observable is that Christians have taken this passage as a call to a physical bending of the knee or bowing of the head at every instance where the name of Jesus is mentioned. This is observable during the personal prayers of many Christians and the liturgical celebrations of some Christian denominations. On the other hand, this paper argues that the emphasis of these verses is not on a physical bowing of the head at the mention of the name of Jesus. Rather, what is at stake is a call to imitate the humility of Jesus, who did not cling to his equality with God. The self-emptying of Jesus is the reason for his ultimate exaltation by God. This meaning stands out clearly from a contextual reading of the pericope. Therefore, the passage has more implications for ethical reformation and communal living than for the liturgical gesture of bending the knee or bowing the head.*

**Keywords:** Divinity, Ethical Reformation, Humility, *Kenosis*, Liturgy, Name

**1. Introduction**

A wide range of scholarly articles, books and monographs consider Philippians 2:5–11 a central passage in this letter. For Lohmeyer, this section belongs to one of the most difficult passages of the Pauline letters.<sup>2</sup> Most of the works devoted to this pericope are focused on the Christological import of the pericope and its formal characteristics like its genre, structure, and origin.<sup>3</sup> Mary Ann Getty has traced its

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<sup>2</sup> E. Lohmeyer, *Der Brief an die Philipper*, in the Meyer series, 11th ed. revised by W. Schmauch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), 90. See also R. P. Martin, *Carmen Christi: Philippians ii:5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); R. B. Stimpfle, 'Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Studies: Some Exegetical Conclusions,' *WTJ* 41 (1979) 247-248 and Ralph P. Martin/Gerald F. Hawthorne, *WBC 43 Philippians (revised)*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 2004), 92-98.

<sup>3</sup> J. Weiss has studied the poetic rhythmic nature of this pericope. See his *Beiträge zur paulinischen Rhetorik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1897). His conclusion has

Old Testament background<sup>4</sup> while Vincent Olusakin has considered its relevance to African Christology in particular. His paper sees Christ as a model of selfless sacrifice, serving a rich lesson for servant leadership in the African context.<sup>5</sup> Gordon Fee sees it as one of the most exalted, one of the most beloved, and one of the most discussed and debated passages in the Pauline corpus.<sup>6</sup> For Lohmeyer, it is the *locus classicus* of Christology in Philippians.<sup>7</sup> This has necessitated the avalanche of literature on this pericope.

However, it seems that none of these studies has paid a sustained attention to the application of the passage to the bowing of the head during prayers and liturgical celebrations in many Christian denominations. It is this lack that the present paper tries to fill.<sup>8</sup> Since many Christians bow the head at the mention of the name of Jesus during their prayers, it is important that an examination of this passage and its relevance to this pious or liturgical gesture be taken into consideration. Coupled to this liturgical bowing of the head is the belief, among some Christians, that a mere pronouncing of the name of Jesus is the magical wand to overcome every spiritual problem. These tendencies seem to emanate from a wrong interpretation and a wrong application of the verses under consideration.

Therefore, the paper begins with an intensive consideration of the literary context of the verse within the letter to the Philippians. This is important since context determines meaning to a great extent. This contextual reading of the verse would aim at establishing the logical flow of thought from v.1 to v.11 of the chapter. It also investigates the linguistic properties of the text. Since the passage comes from a certain cultural tradition where the name of someone has some important significance, the study will also relate the passage to the importance of the name

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been adopted by many scholars including E. Lohmeyer, *Kyrios Jesus: Eine Untersuchung zu Phil. 2, 5-11* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1928); J. Jeremias, 'Zur Gedankenführung in den paulinischen Briefen.' in *Studia Paulina in Honorem J. de Zwaan, Ed. J. N. Sevenster and W. C. Unnik*. (Haarlem: Bonn, 1953); R. Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus der frühen Christenheit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), etc. Those who have questioned the genre of the passage as a hymn include Stephen E. Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus* JSNTSS 36 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990); Gordon D. Fee, 'Philippians 2:5-11: Hymn or Exalted Pauline Prose?' *Bulletin for Biblical Research* vol. 2 (1992), 29-46.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Ann Getty, *Philippians and Philemon* (Wilmington: Michael Glazer, 1980), 28-32.

<sup>5</sup> Vincent A. Olusakin, 'Pauline Christology in Philippians 2:5-11 and the Quest for African Christ,' *Sky Journal of Educational Research* vol. 5 (4), (2017), 27-33.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon D. Fee, 'Philippians 2:5-11,' 29-46.

<sup>7</sup> E. Lohmeyer, *Kyrios Jesus*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> We have undertaken a similar study in 'Exonerating Paul from the Abuse of an Ancient Christological Hymn among Nigerian Christians: A Fresh Look at Phil. 2:1-11' *WAJES* vol. 14 (2020/2021), 68-87. The present study is a refinement of the arguments in that paper.

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in the Greco-Roman world as well as to the biblical tradition. It is hoped that this will make the intention of the passage clearer to the reader.

**2. The Micro-Context of Phil 2:10**

The Christological hymn which St Paul presented in his letter to the Philippians is contained in vv.5-11 of the second chapter of the letter. It could be argued that the passage introduces a sharp break from the discussion on ‘some of the circumstances presently affecting the Philippians’<sup>9</sup> which started in v.1 and is picked up in v.12.<sup>10</sup> Yet, there is a connection between our passage and the preceding verses. In v.5, Paul invites the Christians of Philip to have the same attitude, which is in Christ Jesus. This is evident in the injunction *touto phroneite* which can be translated as ‘let this attitude.’ The combination of the demonstrative *touto* and the imperative *phroneite* means that Paul is urging a change of attitude or a change of thinking from his addressees. Although the word *phroneite* (from the verb *phronein*) could mean many things, ranging from ‘to have understanding’, ‘to feel’, ‘to think’, ‘to direct one’s mind to a thing’, etc.,<sup>11</sup> the paper adopts ‘attitude’ as a better translation since *phronein* is a verb of moral endeavour. As we shall come to see, the hymn is an invitation to the Philippian Christians to have a change of attitude.

This call to a change of attitude follows from the preceding verses 1–4. In these verses, Paul invites the Philippians to a life of like-mindedness (*phronein*), mutual love, one accord and one mind (*phronein*) as the way of fulfilling the joy he has in them. The word *phronein* is used twice in v.2 alone. Its eight occurrences in this letter shows how important Paul regards unity, based on like-mindedness, as the foundation of living in a Christian community.<sup>12</sup> In essence, the Philippians should be of one mind, doing everything out of humility instead of out of jealousy or vanity. This attitude is consecutively stressed in the remaining parts of the pericope. It is an attitude that translates into action. This action should be prevalent in the community. This is the import of the clause *en hymin* which can be rendered as ‘in your community’. The usage of the clause indicates reflects the fact that Paul

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<sup>9</sup> Getty, *Philippians*, 25.

<sup>10</sup> See Stephen E. Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 23. It is in this connection that Hunter sees the hymn as resembling ‘a purple patch’ stitched into the fabric of the exhortation.’ A. M. Hunter, *Paul and His Predecessors* (S.C.M. Press: London, 1961), 48.

<sup>11</sup> See James Strong, *Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), s.v ‘*phroneó*’

<sup>12</sup> cf. Getty, *Philippians*, 25.

was addressing the Philippian Christian community.<sup>13</sup> This brings out the ecclesiological or communal leaning of the passage.

To make clear the radical nature of the attitude Paul wants the Philippians to adopt, he presents the case of Jesus who was in the *morphē* (form) of God (v.6). For Cremer, this '*morphe theou* means the *form of* God as the expression of the divine essence.'<sup>14</sup> As divine essence, it does not imply an outward appearance alone.<sup>15</sup> Instead of clinging to this divine essence, Jesus emptied himself of this *morphē* and took the *morphē* of a slave (v.7).<sup>16</sup> This also implies that his slave form is not an appearance but a reality.<sup>17</sup> The transition from the divine form to the form or substance of a slave is the first step of the radical *kenosis* of Jesus which Paul wants to emphasize and which he invites the Philippian church to emulate.<sup>18</sup> The first step of this *kenosis* also involves being born in the likeness (*homoioōma*) and appearance (*schēma*) of humans (v.7). The second step of the *kenosis* is Jesus' submission to death on the cross (v.8). The ultimate humiliation suffered by Jesus, according to the hymn, is death reserved for criminal slaves (v.8). This has to be seen from the view point of the Greco-Roman world, where a slave was not a person at all but a tool in the hands of the slave-owner.

Having shown the actions Christ Jesus took to manifest his radical humility, Paul underscores, in the second part of the hymn, God's action on Jesus. The beginning of v.9 with the inferential *dio* (therefore) and *kai* (also) shows that the following verses are a result of the preceding ones. This is because when the inferential conjunction *dio* is joined with *kai* it means 'that the inference is self-evident.'<sup>19</sup> This self-evident result is clearly seen in the purpose or result clause of v.10 introduced with *hina* (therefore). What this means is that because of the self-emptying of Jesus, God has ultimately given him a name which is highly exalted

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<sup>13</sup> R. Onyenali, 'Exonerating Paul from the Abuse of an Ancient Christological Hymn among Nigerian Christians: A fresh Look at Phil. 2:5-11,' *WAJES*, vol. 14 (2020/2021), 72.

<sup>14</sup> H. Cremer, *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of the New Testament Greek* (Nabu Press, 2012), 417. The emphasis is original.

<sup>15</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, *Philippians: The Gospel at Work* (Amazon, 1956), 55.

<sup>16</sup> Slave is the proper translation of *doulos* since death by crucifixion is a punishment reserved for slaves and only in extreme cases. See Gerhard Lohfink, *Der letzte Tag Jesu: Was bei der Passion wirklich geschah* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2009), 50.

<sup>17</sup> This argues against Docetism of any kind.

<sup>18</sup> The *kenosis* refers properly to the incarnation and the Crucifixion of Jesus. See H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Cross in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), 105.

<sup>19</sup> Arndt, W. et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

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so that ‘at the name’ of this Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess. It is this self-emptying that is at the heart of the hymn.

**3. The Macro-Context of Phil 2:10**

The macro-context considers the relationship of the hymn to the entire body of the letter to the Philippians. From linguistic considerations, it becomes obvious that the hymn is the summary of the entire letter. The first chapter makes mention of the *koinonia* of the Philippians (1:5) and their sharing (*synkoinōnos*) in the grace of the gospel (1:7). To concretize this *koinonia*, Paul enjoins the Philippians to work with him in prayer (1:19). Again, he pleads that they work with one spirit and with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel (1:27). He then shows how the unity is achieved: it involves sharing with both Christ and Paul through suffering (1:29–30).

The same theme of unity is starkly depicted in the second chapter. Evidently, unity, selfless service and humility seem to be the central focus in the first four verses of this chapter. For instance, Paul exults the community in Philippi to manifest encouragement in Christ (*paraklēsis en Christō*), comfort of love (*paramythion agapēs*), unity in spirit (*koinōnia pneumatōs*) as well as affections and compassions among their members (2:1). The call to unity and selfless service among the members of the community leads Paul to cite the example of Christ Jesus (2:5–11) while pleading with the Philippians to work with God (2:12–13) and urging them to also rejoice together (2:17–18). Apart from the example of Jesus, Timothy and Epaphroditus are practical examples in the community which the Philippian Christians should emulate.

Both the third and fourth chapters of the letter carry forth the themes of self-abnegation and unity. In the person of Paul, we see one who could abandon his claim to Roman citizenship and everything else (3:5–11) in order to share the glory of Christ (3:20–21). The appeal to Euodias and Synyche to have one mind in the Lord, ‘*phronein en kyriō*’ (4:2), employs the same expression that introduces the hymn in 2:5. In the final exhortations of the letter, Paul appeals for an evident gentleness (*epieikes*). In 4:10 the word *phronein*, which introduced the hymn (2:5), occurs two times as Paul thanks the Christian community of Philippi for the gifts given to him. Finally, the glory of Christ Jesus and the glory of God our Father (4:19.20) make a formal link with the conclusion of the hymn (2:11).

What the above analysis shows is the fact that the hymn fits integrally into the micro and macro contexts of the letter. The contextual reading of the passage shows that the hymn is an appeal for unity, which is achieved through humility. This is most evident in the example of Jesus. Again when one considers the immediate context of the pericope under consideration, especially when one pays attention to

2:1–4 and 2:12–13 which bracket our passage of study, one is led to the conclusion that ‘harmony is the issue: humility and selflessness are the way to it.’<sup>20</sup> In the words of Barclay, ‘it is from that [unity] that there arises the great passage which speaks of the selfless humility of Jesus Christ (2:1–11):’<sup>21</sup> After exhorting the Christians in Philippi to lead a life of unity, Paul shows the example of Jesus who did not cling to his divinity. By presenting Jesus as a model who went the way of the cross, Paul proclaims the message of the cross, a folly for the Greeks and a scandal for the Jews (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23). It is in the imitation of Jesus that the Christian community achieves the power that is manifest through the person of Jesus.

#### **4. A Structural Analysis of the Text**

Although several structural models have been posited for the study of the pericope,<sup>22</sup> it is easy to divide the hymn into two parts. Bracketing v.5 as the introduction, the first part of the hymn proper, that is vv.6–8 reflects Jesus’ humiliation by his own act. The use of the reflexive pronoun *heauton* ‘himself’ (v.7) reflects the reflexive nature of this action. He was the one who took the likeness of humans. This personal act of Jesus is shown by *labōn*, the aorist participle of *labánō* (take on to oneself). The first part can be subdivided into two steps. The first step is Jesus’ descent from divinity to humanity (vv.6–7), while the second step is a further descent from human dignity to human ignominy (v.8). ‘These two steps exhibit an interchange between Jesus’ original position, his attitude in this position and a humble action that empties him to a less exalted position.’<sup>23</sup> This could be presented thus:

Part A. Action of Jesus (vv.6–8)

1. First step: from divinity to humanity (vv.6–7)

a) His original position: equality with God (v.6a)

b) His attitude: humility shown in willingness to give up divine status (v.6b)

c) His action: from divine form to human form (v.7)

2. Second step: from human form to death on the cross (v.8)

a) His new position: human (v.8a)

b) His attitude: humility shown in willingness to die on the cross (v.8b–c)

c) His action: obedient submission to death on a cross (v.8d).

It is clear from this structure that the attitude of Jesus is central in these two steps. In the first step, his attitude is shown in his willingness to give up his divine status

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<sup>20</sup> Gordon D. Fee, ‘*Philippians 2:5–11?*’ 8.

<sup>21</sup> W. Barclay, *Philippians*, 6.

<sup>22</sup> See Martin/Gerald, *Philippians*, 100–103.

<sup>23</sup> Onyenali, ‘Exonerating,’ 74.

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(v.6b). This attitude is sandwiched between his original divine position and his acceptance of human form. In the second step, his attitude is his willingness to die on the cross. These attitudes summarize his humble disposition. To buttress this point, Jesus’ attitude of humility is shown in his willingness to abandon his divine status, to be a human slave, and to die on the cross. The second part of the hymn is Jesus’ exaltation by the act of God (vv.9–11). This second part can be subdivided into two, namely, God’s exaltation of Jesus (v.9) and the purpose of this exaltation (vv.10–11). As already stated, the introduction of the action of God with ‘therefore’ (v.9) is an indication that what God begins to do in Jesus is a result of what Jesus had already done. In other words, Jesus manifested an attitude of humility, therefore God exalted him. The purpose of this exaltation is universal worship, introduced by ‘so that’.<sup>24</sup> The use of *Kurios* (Lord) for Jesus also justifies this divine attribute.<sup>25</sup> One could conclude that what God did in the second part of the hymn is a reversal of what Jesus took upon himself in the first part. The divine action exalted the humiliated Jesus to his original status as God.

The element of parallelism is strong in the first part of the hymn.<sup>26</sup> This can be shown with these four considerations: (1) In v.6 ‘*ouch*’ (not) introduces what Jesus did not do. This sets off a contrasting parallel with what Jesus did in v.7, introduced with ‘*alla*’ (but). (2) In v.6, the clause *en morphē theou hyparchōn* (existing in the form of God) and the clause in v.7 *morphēn doulou labōn* (taking the form of a slave) are synonymous parallels at the level of grammar. They are synonymous because they involve the taking of the form of something. However, they form contrasting parallels at the level of words. This is because of the contrast between God and slave.<sup>27</sup> (3) The repetition of participles in vv.7–8 by adding new elements creates a climatic effect. For example, ‘he emptied himself’ and ‘he humbled himself’ both employ the reflexive adjectival form, which builds on the meanings of the verbs. Similarly, ‘form’, ‘likeness’ and ‘appearance’ refer to the sensory perception of an object. Hence, we have a triad of modes of perception. (4) Finally,

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<sup>24</sup> The use of the phrase *pan gony kampsē* (ever knee shall bow) in v.10 gives the impression that Paul has the divine status of Christ in mind. In other Pauline passages where *kamptō* (to bend) appears, it seems to have reference to worship of God or worship of Baal (cf. Rom 11:4; 14:11; Eph 3:14). See also 1 Kgs 19:18 (LXX).

<sup>25</sup> It thus becomes a primitive document on which the Christology of early Christianity was built on. See J. Jeremias, ‘Zur Gedankenführung in den paulinischen Briefen: Der Christushymnus, Phil. 2. 6-11’ in *Studia Paulina in honorem J. de Zwaan*, edited by J. N. Sevenster and W. C. van Unnik (Haarlem, 1953), 154.

<sup>26</sup> The paper adopts the model set forth by John Lounibos, *Self-Emptying of Christ and the Christian: Three Essays on Kenosis* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 20.

<sup>27</sup> Stephen E. Fowl, *The Story of Jesus*, 24.

there is a contrasting parallel between the slave form that Jesus assumed (v.7) and his exaltation as Lord at the end of the hymn (v.11).<sup>28</sup>

When these two parts are brought together, one sees a chiasmic construction in this form:

A. the divine form of Christ (v.6), B. the human form of Christ (vv.7–8), A.<sup>1</sup> the divine form of Christ (vv.9–11). This structural remark has a theological importance. The structural importance of chiasmus in the text stems from the fact that biblical authors employed chiasmus to cohere, unify, and confine the boundaries of a literary unit.<sup>29</sup> Since chiasmus is a rhetorical device that focuses the reader's attention on the centre of the unit, where the central idea or turning point is situated,<sup>30</sup> this adds to the argument of the paper that Jesus' condition as a human slave is the focal point of the hymn. It is his humility that led him to assume the status of a human slave. This is a model for the Christians in Philippi.<sup>31</sup> It is because of Jesus' manifest humility to take the form of a human slave that made God to bestow universal power to his name.

### **5. Meaning of the 'Name' Jesus**

It is an accepted fact that a name is more than a mere nomenclature. In many cultures of the world, the name serves as an identification marker. For many Africans, a person's name identifies his fate, that of his parents or the circumstances surrounding his birth. Among the Igbos of Nigeria, names like Onwubiko, Onwughara, Onwuka, etc. are an appeal to death to have mercy or the acknowledgment of the power of death. For Mackenzie, 'it is a widespread cultural phenomenon that the name is considered to be more than an artificial tag which distinguishes one person from the other. The name has a mysterious identity with its bearer. It can be considered a substitute for the person who bears it.'<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, 'the name not only suggest its proper meaning... it was a part of the mysterious fullness of the power of the name that it should signify more than the word itself, and when such assonances could be observed they were taken as instances of the powers of the word.'<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See Onyenali, 'Exonerating Paul,' 76f.

<sup>29</sup> See H. Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters*, JSNT sup 111 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 35.

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., Nils W. Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in Formgeschichte* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 40-47.

<sup>31</sup> Stephen E. Fowl, *The Story of Jesus*, 24; Moises Silva, *The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary: Philippians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 127.

<sup>32</sup> J. L. Mackenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (London: Cassel and Co, Ltd, 1966), 603.

<sup>33</sup> Mackenzie, *Dictionary*, 603.



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In biblical accounts, one also sees the importance of the name. Mackenzie admits that this is why ‘occasionally we see that a name was given a child in connection with an event which was contemporaneous with his birth.’<sup>34</sup> The biblical evidence shows that the names of Cain (Gen 4:1) and Seth (Gen 4:25), the names of Moses (Ex 2:10), and Isaiah’s son (Isa 7:3), etc. all have reference to the events in the lives of the people concerned. In the same way, a change of name in the bible signifies a change in a person’s destiny. This is seen in the change from Abram to Abraham (Gen 17:5), Sarai to Sarah (Gen 17:15), Jacob to Israel (Gen 32:28), etc. Also, the ultimate threat to the wicked is that his name would be blotted out (I Sam 24:21; 2 Kings 14:27). The blotting out of the name of the wicked implies the extinction of the wicked ones. The same idea applies to the name of God. To know his name is to know him (cf. Gen 32:28–29; Isa 52:6). In the experience of the burning bush (Exod 3:13–14), Moses tenaciously requested to know the name of God, that is, the identity of God. The Bible also sees a departure from God as forgetting the name of God (cf. Jer 23:37). In no way does this imply forgetting the appellation ‘YHWH’. Finally, the prophets always spoke in the name of God. This does not imply a repetitious ‘in God’s name.’ Rather, they were rendering their prophecies as representatives or mouthpiece of God. In the words of Lindblom, ‘...That prophets brought Yahweh’s word to their people is also expressed in the assertion that they prophesied ‘in Yahweh’s name’ one who carried a message on behalf of another was said to speak in the name of whoever had sent him.’<sup>35</sup> In the final analyses, the Hebrew Testament shows that ‘the name’ expresses the identity of a person or a thing. It is from this biblical background that one approaches the meaning and significance of the name of Jesus at which every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess. This understanding is carried forth in the Christian Testament.<sup>36</sup> The hallowing of the name of God in the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:9), the disciples’ performing of wonders in Jesus’ name, their repudiation of earthly or material possessions in Jesus’ name (cf. Matt 19:29), as well as their gathering in Jesus’ name (Matt 18:20), all convey the same idea. They do not gather to shout the name ‘Jesus’. Rather, the name of Jesus represents his essence. In the Johannine corpus, this concept is very evident. Jesus glorifies the name of the Father by revealing his divinity (John 12:28). This means that God’s name is the same as his divinity. In the same way, Jesus prays that the Father should keep the disciples in his (the Father’s) name. It is ultimately important that the work of Jesus is to make known the name of the Father (John 17:21–26). This means the revelation of the whole essence of the divine head. In the book of revelation (3:4) it is said that there were a few names (*ὀλίγα ὀνόματα*) in Sardis who have not defiled their garments.

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<sup>34</sup> Mackenzie, *Dictionary*, 603.

<sup>35</sup> J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 111-112.

<sup>36</sup> Mackenzie has noted that ‘the divine name in the New Testament is used in Old Testament idioms.’ Mackenzie, *Dictionary*, 604.

The summary of all these is that the name is an important identity marker. Knowing the name of God does not mean pronouncing God's name. In the same way, knowing the name of Jesus or doing anything in his name means more than pronouncing 'Jesus'. This recognition is important for the understanding of the Christological hymn in the letter to the Philippians. The Christian life in the name of Jesus implies leading the kind of life that he has exemplified through his attitude of humility which culminated in his death. It is this attitude of humility that Paul invites the Philippian Christians to emulate.

## **6. Conclusion**

As the paper has shown, the overriding interest of the hymn is to give the ethics of Paul a Christological underpinning.<sup>37</sup> It is an invitation to the Philippian Christians to emulate the example of Christ who did not cling to his divine form. He humbled himself to take the form of a human slave. This humbling attitude led him to the cross and ultimately won him universal exaltation. The paper has shown how the attitude of Jesus is sandwiched between his position and his action. In the first case, the attitude of humility led him to forfeit his original status of divinity so as to become human. In the second case, his attitude of humility led him to accepting being in the form of a slave. The implication is that the attitude which Paul intends the Philippian Christians to adopt is the central focus of the passage. The example of Jesus is a superlative form of self-emptying. In summary, one can conclude that 'the Philippian text is a hymn to illustrate powerfully Paul's teaching, which at this point is identical with that of Jesus: Humble, self-sacrificing service to one's fellow believers done in love is a must for a Christian disciple who would live as a Christian disciple should (Phil 2:3-4).'<sup>38</sup> It is through a life of unity, devoid of selfishness and quarrelling that the Christians would begin to approximate the attitude of Christ.<sup>39</sup> In the words of Barclay, 'Paul is pleading with the Philippians to live in harmony, to lay aside their discords, to shed their personal ambitions and their pride and their desire for prominence and prestige, and to have in their hearts that humble, selfless desire to serve, which was the essence of the life of Christ. His final and unanswerable appeal is to point to the example of Jesus Christ.'<sup>40, 41</sup> The implication is that the Christological hymn is not an invitation to resounding verbalization of the name of Jesus. It is not meant to be an oral confession of the

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<sup>37</sup> See Getty, *Philippians*, 36.

<sup>38</sup> Martin/Gerald, *Philippians*, 103.

<sup>39</sup> Udo Schelle, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 163.

<sup>40</sup> W. Barclay, *Philippians*, 34-35.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. 2 Cor 8:9; Rom 15:1-6. One could also pursue other theological interest in the letter. For instance, the theme of eschatological vindication seems to loom in the background when one considers Phil 2:9-11. This theme is also referred to in other places like 1:6; 1:10-11; 1:21-23; 3:11-14; 3:20-21.

**ONYENALI: 'At the Name of Jesus every Knee should Bow' (Phil. 2:10): A Call to Liturgical Gesture or Ethical Reformation?**

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Lordship of Jesus. Jesus had already warned against this tendency of crying out 'Lord, Lord' but failing to adhere to the commands of Jesus (cf. Matt 7:21).

Again, the biblical sources have shown that the name is the person. The name of Jesus is the person of Jesus. The name of Jesus is made manifest in the Christian assembly when each individual member begins to approximate the self-emptying which is the hallmark of the incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus. As Jesus has manifested both the form of God and the form of a slave, the form of Christ must also be evident in the life of Christians.<sup>42</sup> This is only possible in a situation of humility engendered by the desire to achieve Christian unity. The means that every member of the church show eschew the attitude of self-importance and embrace humble service of the brethren (cf. Matt 18:1–4), when church leaders exploit their privileged position as source of material enrichment and not a call to servant-leadership, the Christian assembly becomes a social club devoid of the spirit of Christ. Consequently, the bending of the knee or the bowing of the head at the mention of the name of Jesus during prayers does not reflect the intention of Paul in this letter. Hence, the next time we think about the 'name of Jesus', let us begin to imitate the person of Jesus. This imitation begins when we approximate his self-emptying in the humble service of our brothers and sisters.

Therefore, if our analysis is correct, it implies that when the Christian assembly gathers for prayers or any form of liturgical celebrations in the name of Jesus, the stress should be on emulating the humble and selfless sacrifice of Jesus which made him to abandon his divine status for the sake of the redemption of humankind. This is the proper way of bending the knee at the name of Jesus on whom God has conferred universal authority.

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<sup>42</sup> Getty, *Philippians*, 33.