

Expiation–Propitiation–Reconciliation

by

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*1. Introductory*¹

As is well-known, the New Testament does not present a systematic theology of the Christian Faith. Nevertheless, it supplies all the necessary ingredients toward a systematic theology. Of all the writings of the New Testament, the most systematic is the epistle to the Romans. The epistle to the Hebrews offers a more or less systematic presentation of the sacrificial system in Israel as this is fulfilled in the high priesthood of Christ, who is not only the high priest but becomes also the sacrificial victim. But the scope of this epistle is quite narrow as compared with the wide vistas that open up in the epistle to the Romans.²

This absence of a formally systematic theology in the New Testament is to be explained by what constituted the pressing needs of the young, growing Church. The epistles of Paul, for example, were written to solve practical problems that had arisen in the various congregations. And even Romans, the most systematic of all Paul's epistles, was written as an occasional letter with practical aims in view.³

¹ This study has been written in as simple and non-technical manner as was possible. However, in order to discuss the subject somewhat adequately, it was impossible to avoid some technical terminology as well as a few references to ancient and modern literature. In order not to burden the main text, such technicalities have been relegated for the most part to the footnotes.

² It is my hope that I have given a little specimen of the rich contents of this letter in my book, *Huvudpunkter i Paulus undervisning*, XP-Media 2018.

³ Cf. the essays in *The Romans Debate*, ed. K.P. DONFRIED, rev. ed. Peabody Mass., 1991 and CHRYS C. CARAGOUNIS, "From Obscurity to Prominence: The Development of the Roman Church Between Romans and 1 Clement" in *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome*, ed. K.P. DONFRIED–P. RICHARDSON, Eerdmans 1998, 245–79, esp. pp. 246–7.

Curious as it may seem, the early Christian authors and the Church Fathers, embroiled as they were in opposing heresies and composing works for the edification, instruction and organization of their congregations and at the same time defining the faith (e.g. the creeds, especially the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 325–381), they simply did not take up the challenge of producing a detailed doctrine about the death of Christ and its consequences, i.e. what exactly was involved in the ‘atonement’. Of course, it was understood that Christ had died for sinners, that all men were sinners and that they were in need of repentance in order to receive forgiveness at the hands of God and access to eternal life. Origenis, in fact, went as far as speculating that the ransom that Christ paid to release sinners from the grip of Satan, was paid to the Devil himself. Here, perhaps we have a timid beginning of a doctrine of ‘atonement’, which was not a very happy one.

It appears that it was not until Anselm (1033–1109), the Catholic Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote his important *Cur Deus Homo* (1099, = *Why did God Become Man?*), that this doctrine received its first serious treatment. Anselm’s position was that through his sin man was guilty before God. God’s righteousness demanded satisfaction, which could be effected only by the death of man. On the other hand, God’s love also demanded the forgiveness and acquittal of man. Faced with this dilemma, God undertook to let himself bear the guilt of man in the person of His incarnated Son, Jesus Christ. This became known as the *Objective View of Atonement* or Reconciliation, that is to say, God is the object of the ‘atonement’ that Christ achieved on the cross.

A younger contemporary of Anselm was Frenchman Pierre Abélard (1070–1142), one of the most capable logicians and philosopher-theologians of the Middle Ages. On the issue of the ‘atonement’, he took the opposite stance to Anselm, emphasizing the love of God, which led Him to offer His Son in order to bring men to repentance and willingness to doing the will of God. He thus produced what has been called the Moral influence understanding of the ‘atonement’. Jesus’ death was a demonstration of God’s love for man. Man needed to change his perception of God from a God of judgment to a God of love. Since God was the One who took the initiative to reconcile man to

Himself, God acted as the subject, wherefore this teaching took the name *Subjective Atonement*.

Both of these positions found a great number of followers. However, the main idea in the teaching of Anselm became the standard Christian explanation of the ‘atonement’ and was adopted by the Catholic (as modified by Thomas Aquinas), Lutheran and Reformed (as modified by John Calvin) Churches. Abélard was, as a matter of fact, excommunicated for his teaching.

2. The New Testament Terms and the Ideas Behind Them

The scholastic thinkers of the Middle Ages, e.g. Anselm, Abélard, Aquinas and Grotius, in their formulation of their respective doctrines on the ‘atonement’ used philosophical categories and methods for arriving at their conclusions. At this time Platon had been more or less superseded by Aristoteles, who was the chief source of information on logic and logical argumentation.⁴ Thus, Hellenic philosophical logic was put to use in the formulation of their positions on questions such as why did Christ die?, to whom did he pay the ransom?, did God need to be placated?, did Christ die for all or only for the elect?, is Christ’s death to be understood as satisfaction (i.e. reparation) for the honor, holiness and righteousness of God, or only as a moral example, showing God’s love for man? etc. etc. Evidently, these masters of logic found Hellenic philosophy more suitable for settling this central issue of the Christian Faith than the New Testament texts that address the same. Not that they never quote the Biblical texts, but that their explanations follow primarily philosophical ways of argumentation.

The New Testament uses the following terms that impinge on our present subject:

- 1 a. *katharizō* (‘cleanse’, ‘purify’)⁵
- b. *katharismos* (‘cleansing’, ‘purification’)⁶

⁴ Platon had been influential on John Scotus Erigena in the ninth century.

⁵ Hellenic καθαρίζω (pronounce: *katharízo*).

⁶ Hellenic καθαρισμός (pron.: *katharismós*)

- 2 a. *hilaskomai* ('propitiate')⁷
 b. *hilasmos* ('propitiation')⁸
 c. *hilastēri-os, -on* ('propitiatory')⁹
 d. *hileōs* ('propitious', 'gracious')¹⁰
 e. *exilaskomai* (in LXX:)¹¹
 f. *exilasmos* (in LXX:)¹²
 g. *exilastēri-os, -on* (LXX)¹³
 3 a. *lytron* ('ransom')¹⁴
 b. *antilytron* ('ransom for/instead of')¹⁵
 4 a. *hyper* ('for [the sake of]', 'instead of')¹⁶
 b. *peri* ('for', 'about')¹⁷
 c. *anti* ('instead of')¹⁸
 5 a. *katallassō* ('to reconcile')¹⁹
 b. *katallagē* ('reconciliation')²⁰

1. The verb *katharizō* has been the normal Hellenic word for 'to cleanse', 'to purify', 'to purge' in all periods of the language and as such it occurs at various contexts in the New Testament.

2. The most important and at the same time the most contested term is the verb *hilaskomai*, whose basic meaning is 'propitiate', 'appease', 'placate'.²¹ From the same stem derive a number of words like *hileōs*²²

⁷ Hellenic ἰλάσκομαι (pron.: *iláskome*)

⁸ Hellenic ἰλασμός (pron.: *ilasmós*)

⁹ Hellenic ἰλαστήρι-ος, -ιον (pron.: *ilastírios -on*)

¹⁰ Hellenic ἰλεως (pron.: *ileos*)

¹¹ Hellenic ἐξιλάσκομαι (pron.: *exiláskome*)

¹² Hellenic ἐξιλασμός (pron.: *exilasmós*)

¹³ Hellenic ἐξιλαστήρι-ος, -ον (pron.: *exilastíri-os, -on*)

¹⁴ Hellenic λύτρον (pron.: *lýtron*)

¹⁵ Hellenic ἀντίλυτρον (pron.: *antílytron*)

¹⁶ Hellenic ὑπέρ (pron.: *ipér*)

¹⁷ Hellenic περί (pron.: *perí*)

¹⁸ Hellenic ἀντί (pron.: *antí*)

¹⁹ Hellenic καταλλάσσω (pron.: *katalláссо*)

²⁰ Hellenic καταλλαγή (pron.: *katallaghí*)

²¹ With regard to its etymology, this verb derives from the stem *hilask-* (ἰλάσκ-). This comes from the root *sla-* (σλα-) with reduplication *si* (σι) = *sisla-* (σι-σλα-), of which the first 's' became a spiritus asper (´) while the second 's' was attracted to 'l' and became 'll' (i.e. *sisla-* (σισλα) became *hilla-*: ἰ-λλά). To this was added the

= ‘propitious’, ‘merciful’; *hilēōsis*²³ = ‘propitiation’; *hilasia*²⁴ ‘propitiation’; *hilasma*²⁵ = ‘propitiation’; *hilasmos* = ‘propitiation’; *hilasimos*²⁶ = ‘placable’; *hilastērion* = ‘propitiatory’ as well as the compounds *exilaskomai* = ‘propitiate’; *exilasmos* = ‘propitiation’, ‘(Day of) Atonement’; *exilastērios* = ‘propitiatory’ etc. etc.

The above words as well as other forms derived from the same basic stem of the *hilask-* group occur in Hellenic literature more than 2.000 times apart from the occurrences in the inscriptions and the papyri, which are almost as many. Of these words, the word that preponderates is the verb *hilaskomai* in its various tenses and moods. Now this verb occurs in Hellenic literature all the way from Homeros (c. 800 B.C.) down to Mediaeval times. Though *hilaskomai* is used in the Katharevousa, i.e. puristic form of Neohellenic, the colloquial demotic Neohellenic has substituted for it another form from the same root: *exileōnō*²⁷ = ‘propitiate’. Analogical meaning have the related Neohellenic derivatives: *exileōsi(s)*²⁸ ‘propitiation’, ‘expiation’, *exilasmos* ‘propitiation’, *exilastērios,-on* ‘propitiatory’, *exileōtikos*²⁹ ‘propitiatory’, ‘expiatory’, etc. Here, we note that the senses of ‘propitiation’ and ‘expiation’ in Neohellenic *exileōsi(s)* and *exileōtikos* sometimes tend to run together (see below).

From the above data on the *hilask-* (ιλᾶσκ-) word group it must have become clear that the basic meaning of this root is the idea of propitiation, appeasement, placation of a person whose wrath has been aroused because of improper behavior towards him. This meaning has been constant from the beginnings of Hellenic literature (Homeros) to the written and spoken language of today – a continuous history of 2.800 years.

morpheme sk- (σκ-) giving the form *hillask-*: ι-λλᾶσκ). The two ‘ll’ were then reduced to one ‘l’: *hilask* (ιλᾶσκ-).

²² Hellenic ἴλεως; Epic ἴλαος from which *hilastērion* (ἱλαστήριον) = ‘propitiatory’, ‘mercy seat’.

²³ Hellenic ἰλέωσις (pron.: *ilēosis*).

²⁴ Hellenic ἰλασία (pron.: *ilasía*).

²⁵ Hellenic ἱλασμα (pron.: *ilasma*).

²⁶ Hellenic ἰλάσιμος (pron.: *ilásimos*).

²⁷ Hellenic ἐξιλέωνω (pron.: *exileóno*).

²⁸ Hellenic ἐξιλέωσι (pron.: *exilēosi*).

²⁹ Hellenic ἐξιλεωτικός (pron.: *exileotikós*).

3. A third term that is used in connection with the consequences of the death of Christ is *lytron* (λύτρον) ‘ransom’. The idea of ransom has its classical example in the last book (i.e. chapter) of Homeros’ *Ilias*, entitled “The Ransom of Hector”.³⁰ The term *lytron* (pl. *lytra*), which derives from the verb *lyō*³¹, does not occur in Homeros’ text, the idea being expressed by the verb *lyō* = ‘to loose’, ‘to let go’, ‘to free’, when King Priamos of Troy comes to the Achaean hero, Achilles, with gifts in order to placate the latter’s wrath and buy back/redeem with *apoina*³² = ‘ransom’ the corpse of his son, Hector, to bury it.³³ At this archaic period *apoina* was used for what in classical, Hellenistic (including the NT), Byzantine, Mediaeval and Neohellenic came to be expressed by the term *lytron/lytra*.

Three prepositions are also relevant here. *hyper*³⁴ = ‘for’/‘for the sake of’/‘on behalf of’; b. *peri*³⁵ = ‘for’/‘about’/‘with respect to’; and c. *anti*³⁶ = ‘instead of’. These three words are used in connection with Christ’s giving his life *for* the world. On these words, see below.

5. Finally, the verb *katallassō*³⁷, ‘to reconcile’ and the substantive *katallagē*³⁸, ‘reconciliation’. These words are derived from the preposition *kata*, ‘down’, ‘toward’, ‘at’, ‘against’, etc., and the verb *allassō*, ‘change’, ‘alter’, ‘exchange’. The meaning of the compound verb is ‘to exchange a previous state of alienation or enmity for a state of friendship’, i.e. active ‘to reconcile’ and passive ‘to be reconciled’.

³⁰ Hellenic Ἔκτορος λύτρα (pron.: *Ektoros lytra*).

³¹ Hellenic λύω (pron.: *lío*).

³² Hellenic ἄποινα (pron.: *ápina*). *Apoina* derives from ποινή. Originally ποινή was the price a murderer paid to the relatives of someone he had killed. This would free the murderer from all future consequences, such as prosecution. In other words, it was the ransom paid for his expiation. Thus, *apoina* came to mean ‘ransom (-money/gifts)’.

³³ See Homeros, *Ilias*, XXIV. 118-9, 137-9, etc.

³⁴ Hellenic ὑπέρ (pron.: *ipér*).

³⁵ Hellenic περί (pron.: *perí*).

³⁶ Hellenic ἀντί (pron.: *antí*)

³⁷ Hellenic καταλλάσσω (pron.: *katalláссо*).

³⁸ Hellenic καταλλαγή (pron.: *katallaghí*).

3. *Expiation versus Propitiation*

Making the Hellenic terminology their point of departure both translators of the Bible and expositors³⁹ have understood the work of Christ on the cross to be one of *expiating* sins and thereby *propitiating* the Father. Thus, the *Rheims Version*, the *KJV*, the *NASB* and the *Amplified Bible* understand *hilastērion* in Rm 3:25 as ‘propitiation’. But there are also more recent translations like the *RSV*, the *NEB* and the *NAB* that understand *hilastērion* as ‘expiation’, while the *NIV* and the *NRSV* evade taking a position on the issue by opting for the more general and neutral ‘sacrifice of atonement’.

The understanding of *hilastērion* as expiation goes back to an article by an eminent New Testament scholar by the name of C.H. Dodd.⁴⁰ In this article Dodd argues that the LXX translators use the word-group *hilaskomai – hilasmos* not in the old “crude” pagan way⁴¹, according to which men seek to propitiate an angry god (as object of propitiation) but in a new way – more appropriate to the nature of the Hebrew God – in which the meaning is expiation of men’s sin, where sin is the object of the cultic sacrifices or else forgiveness of men’s sin, where God is the subject of the verb. Thus, Dodd, speaking of the way the Hellenic terms are used in the LXX – i.e. as *expiation* – says that this is “an entirely new usage, with no pagan parallels”⁴² and that the meaning of ‘propitiation’ at this time was “*a dead meaning*” (my emphasis).⁴³ It is obvious here that Dodd is totally unaware of the fact that *hilaskomai-hilasmos* in Hellenic literature has continued to have uniformly the meaning of ‘propitiation’ till the present day!⁴⁴

³⁹ Especially older expositors, see e.g. H. ALFORD, *The Greek Testament*, London, etc. 1865, Vol. II, p. 343.

⁴⁰ C.H. DODD, “Ἰλάσκεσθαι, its cognates, derivatives and synonyms in the Septuagint”, *JTS* 32 (1931), 352–60. This was reprinted as Chapter 5, “Atonement” in DODD’s book *The Bible and the Greeks*, London 1935. See also his *The Epistle to the Romans* (MNTC), 1932 *ad loc.*

⁴¹ DODD, *The Bible and the Greeks*, p. 88. Dodd’s view of ancient Hellenic religion is rather simplistic. Cf. BÜCHSEL’s sobering remarks, in TDNT, Vol. III, p. 311 f.

⁴² DODD, *The Bible and the Greeks*, p. 89.

⁴³ DODD, *The Bible and the Greeks*, p. 93.

⁴⁴ References to the use of the various words till the Middle Ages can conveniently be found in TLG. For the modern period, see *Μεγάλη Ἑλληνικὴ*

In an article long ago,⁴⁵ Roger R. Nicole criticized Dodd for failing to take account of the whole Old Testament evidence – Dodd examined only a little more than one third of it – which resulted in his drawing a lop-sided conclusion about the meaning of the LXX and the Hebrew terms.⁴⁶ And Cranfield expresses it, “Dodd failed to pay adequate attention to the context of these words’ occurrences”.⁴⁷ However, the scholar who offered the most detailed criticism of Dodd’s theory, and at the same time presented in detail the Old Testament and New Testament evidence, demonstrating the meaning of ‘propitiation’, was Leon Morris.⁴⁸

What seems to be the chief reason for refusing to accept the Hellenic meaning of the *hilaskomai-hilasmōs* group of words, is the idea that such a meaning would reduce the God of the Bible to the level of the Hellenic gods. Now, as I have shown in a study on Hellenic culture and religiosity *vis à vis* the Book of Daniel, published way back

Ἐγκυκλοπαίδεια, 28 Vols., 2nd ed. 1956, Vol. 12, p. 953 (written in Katharevousa Neohellenic), and Θ. ΒΟΣΤΑΝΤΖΟΓΛΟΥ, *Ἀντιλεξικὸν ἢ Ὀνομαστικόν*, Athens 1962. For Demotic Neohellenic, see ἰλασμός in Γ. ΜΠΑΜΠΙΝΙΩΤΗ, *Λεξικὸ τῆς Νέας ἐλληνικῆς Γλώσσας*, 1998, and in *Χρηστικὸ Λεξικὸ τῆς Νεοελληνικῆς Γλώσσας* [Ἀκαδημία Ἀθηνῶν] (ed. Χ.Γ. ΧΑΡΑΛΑΜΠΑΚΗ), Athens 2014. The above works show clearly that the meaning of this root has been preserved to the present day.

⁴⁵ R.R. NICOLE, “C.H. Dodd and the Doctrine of Propitiation”, *WTJ* 17 (1955), 117–57.

⁴⁶ The present author has had occasion to criticize Dodd for failing to present all the facts of the LXX correctly and for misinterpreting the Neohellenic evidence about Mt 12:28, which was the corner-stone of his doctrine of realized eschatology, see CHRYS C. CARAGOUNIS, “Kingdom of God, Son of Man and Jesus’ Self-Understanding” *Tyndale Bulletin* 1988, pp. 3–23 and 223–38, here p. 13 and *The Development of Greek and the New Testament. Morphology, Syntax, Phonology and Textual Transmission* (WUNT 167), Tübingen: Mohr 2004, pp. 261 ff.

⁴⁷ C.E.B. CRANFIELD, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* 2 Vols. (ICC), Edinburgh, 1977, Vol. I, 216.

⁴⁸ L. MORRIS, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, London 1955, 3rd ed. 1965, pp. 144–213. J. D.G. DUNN, *Romans 1–8* (WBC), Dallas, TX, 1988, p.171 seems to minimize the importance of the issue, preferring – as often when he is uncertain – a more ambiguous understanding of it.

in 1989⁴⁹, in Homeros and Hesiodos, where we are presented with the normative picture of Hellenic religion, “the gods are portrayed with the ordinary passions of men and women: they are jealous, spiteful, vengful, hating, immoral. In fact, humans often seem to be outstripped by the gods in vice”.⁵⁰ The fact is that in presenting their gods in this caricature way, the Hellenes showed not only that they did not believe in their gods (Platon bears witness to the youth of Athens who did not believe in their gods, see my study just mentioned), but that what they said about them was highly sarcastic.⁵¹ Of course, the words as such meant what they were used for, though the religious aspect should not be taken at face value, as Dodd seem to do. Thus, because of their caprices and whims, when they can become a menace to men, they need gifts and offerings in order to be appeased or propitiated. The God of the Bible is, however, very different. His wrath is not an uncontrolled passion or an outburst of anger or malice, but has his holiness, righteousness and justice at its base.

The proponents of the expiation theory make the grave mistake of thinking that since the God of the Bible is not like the gods of the Hellenic pantheon, therefore, He has no wrath but only love. Because God is love, they say, He takes the initiative to save the sinner and so the Bible speaks only of the need to expiate sin and bring men to God. Now, there is no question whatsoever about the immense love of God toward man, which led Him to not “spare His own Son but deliver him up [to death] for us all” (Rm 8:32) in order to redeem us. But to say that according to the Bible no wrath is predicated of God is to blatantly close one’s eyes to the evidence.

It is a fact that the Old Testament speaks more often of wrath, in particular of God’s wrath than of God’s love! The word ‘wrath’ (*orgē*) occurs about 300 times in the LXX Old Testament (translating 17 Hebrew words), the great majority of which are in reference to God’s own wrath. To these may be added some 70 instances of the verb ‘to be

⁴⁹ CHRYS C. CARAGOUNIS, “Greek Culture and Jewish Piety: The Clash and the Fourth Beast of Dan 7”, *ETL* 65 (1989), pp. 280–308 (esp. 283–90), which offers a succinct but fairly documented picture of Greek religiosity.

⁵⁰ CHRYS C. CARAGOUNIS, “Greek Culture”, p. 283–4.

⁵¹ The Homeric and Hesiodic picture changed with the adbent of philosophy, see Chrys C. CARAGOUNIS, *Greek Culture*, pp.286–94.

wrathful/angry' (*orgizomai*), of which, again, the majority refer to God's being angered. Morris devotes more than seven pages to discussing Old Testament texts that speak of God's wrath. Here, I can only refer to a few examples.

One of the most serious reasons for God's wrath is when Israel falls into idolatry. We read of this not only in the Decalogue (Dt 5:7–9) but also in Dt 6:14: "You shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the peoples who are round about you; for the Lord your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth" (similarly Josh 32:16). When the Israelites made the golden calf, God said to Moses: "Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them". In connection with the Baal Peor incident God said to Moses: "Take all the chiefs of the people, and hang them in the sun before the Lord, that the fierce anger of the Lord *may turn away* from Israel!" (Num 25:4). This evidence is clear and categorical. The Psalms also refer quite often to God's wrath, see e.g. (LXX) 2:5; 6:2; 7:7; 17 (18):8; 29 (30):6; 54 (55): 22; 55 (56): 8; 68 (69): 25; 77 (78): 21, 31, 38, 49; 89 (90): 7, 9, 11; 109 (110): 5).

But the Old Testament is not one-sided in presenting God as wrathful or angry. There are also many passages in which the love, the kindness and the mercy of God are emphasized. As Morris points out "While wrath is a dreadful reality, it must not be taken as the last word about God".⁵² The Psalmist sings in gratitude: "Thou didst withdraw all thy wrath; thou didst turn from thy hot anger" (Ps 85:3), while Mi 7:18 exults: "Who is a God like thee, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger for ever because he delights in mercy/steadfast love". Morris' conclusion is apt: "The general picture which the Old Testament gives us of God is of One who is by nature merciful, and who cannot be swayed by man's puny efforts. In the last resort forgiveness is already due to God's being what He is, and not to anything that man may do. Because God is God, He must react in the strongest manner to man's sin, and thus we reach the concept of the divine wrath. But because God is God, wrath cannot be the last word. 'The Lord is good; his mercy endureth for ever' (Ps 100:5)".

⁵² MORRIS, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, p. 153.

The New Testament uses the substantive ‘love’ 116 times. Of these, only 15 instances refer to God’s love. The verb ‘to love’ occurs 143 times, but of these only about 27 instances refer to the love of God, which are divided about equally between God’s love for His own Son and God’s love for men! In contrast to these numbers, the term ‘wrath’ (*orgē*) occurs in the New Testament 36 times, of which 32 instances refer to God’s wrath! To these we may add a few instances of ‘anger’ (*thymos*). Thus, the New Testament speaks of God’s wrath about as often as it does of God’s love!

A few examples will be enough to illustrate the point. In Jn 3:36 we have a classic example of God’s wrath: “Whoever believes in the Son has everlasting life; but whoever disobeys the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him”. The verb “abides” is hugely significant. It indicates that the wrath of God is a present reality hanging over man, and it is, therefore, of the greatest consequence that it be removed before it strikes man on the day of judgement. Mt 5:22 speaks of the “fiery Gehenna”; Mt 18:8 of “everlasting fire”; Mk 9:48 says “their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched”; Mt 25:41 “Depart from me, you cursed, to everlasting fire”; Lk 13:3 “No, but I say to you, that unless you repent you will all likewise perish”; Mk 3:29 “Whoever blasphemes against the Holy spirit will never ever receive forgiveness”. Paul speaks repeatedly of the wrath (*orgē*) of God: see e.g. Rm 1:18: “God’s wrath is being revealed from heaven”; Eph 5:6 “Let no one deceive you with vain words; because it is on account of these things that the wrath of God comes over the children of disobedience”; 1 Th 1:10 speaks of “Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come”, 1 Th 2:16 speaking of the unbelieving Jews, says “The wrath of God has come upon them at last”.⁵³ And there are several examples of God’s wrath in Revelation: 6:16 f.; 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15.

That the God of the Bible is ascribed wrath is an indisputable fact, but this does not carry as corollary that He is thought of as the gods of the Hellenic pantheon. Far from it. Thus, such considerations should not lead us to misstate or deny the Biblical facts – as the proponents of

⁵³ Paul is here quoting from the pseudepigraphical *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs: Testament of Levi*, VI. 11 (see edition by M. DE JONGE, Leiden 1964, p. 14), changing only “wrath of the *Lord*” to “wrath of *God*”.

‘expiation only’ do – in order to absolve God of hypothetical charges that are wholly unfounded.

Dodd concedes that in Hellenic literature the *hilaskomai*-group bears uniformly the sense of ‘propitiate’, ‘appease’, ‘placate’. But he thinks that there are two texts in which the meaning is ‘to expiate’. The first text is Platon, *Laws*, 862 c.

But when propitiation (*exilasthen*) has been effected through ransom-paying for each of the outrages that were perpetrated and suffered, then the law always ought to seek to establish friendship [i.e. between the two parties] in place of discord.⁵⁴

For ‘propitiation’ above, Dodd would prefer ‘expiation’, thinking that the action is directed to the crime, but as Büchsel points out,⁵⁵ the wronged person actually changes his attitude and reconciliation is effected. Therefore, ‘propitiation’ ought to be the correct rendering of *exilasthen*.

The other text that Dodd appeals to is the so-called Men Tyrannos inscription:

But if anyone meddles in or tampers with the things of the god, he will have committed a sin against Mēn Tyrannos, in respect to which he will not be able to make propitiation (*exilasasthai*).⁵⁶

Here, the direct object of the verb ‘propitiate’ is a relative pronoun (viz. which) in the accusative case, that refers to the ‘sin’ mentioned earlier. Therefore, Dodd thinks, that since the verb has ‘sin’ as its ultimate object, it must be a question of ‘expiation’ rather than of ‘propitiation’, which would have required a person as its object. However, in Hellenic grammar, this construction with the accusative is often used as an ‘accusative of respect’, which means that we must translate it “with respect to [sin]”.⁵⁷ Moreover, we must also remember that the verb is in the middle, that is, it is used intransitively, which is better translated as “make propitiation” rather than actively “to

⁵⁴ In case any of the readers understands Hellenic, I give the original: Τὸ δὲ ἀποίνοις ἐξιλασθὲν τοῖς δρῶσι καὶ πάσχουσιν ἐκάστας τῶν βλάψεων, ἐκ διαφορᾶς εἰς φιλίαν πειρατέον ἀεὶ καθιστάναι τοῖς νόμοις.

⁵⁵ F. BÜCHSEL, art. “ἰλεως, ἰλάσκομαι”, etc in *TDNT*, Vol. III, p. 316, n. 75.

⁵⁶ *IG II²*, 1366, 16: ὃς ἂν δὲ πολυπραγμονήσῃ τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἢ περιεργάσῃται, ἀμαρτίαν ὀφειλέτω Μηνὶ Τυράννω, ἣν οὐ μὴ δύνηται ἐξειλάσασθαι.

⁵⁷ Morris gives a convenient list of such accusatives p. 204.

propitiate” ([someone]. This appears to be the case here, too, the meaning being that if one sins, he will not be able to make propitiation [understood: to propitiate the god] with respect to his sin. We have a similar accusative of respect in Heb 2:17: “Wherefor he ought to be made like his brothers in all things, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the things of God in order to make propitiation *for/in respect to* their sins”.

Thus, in Hellenic literature, there is no known example in which the *ilaskomai*-group is ever used with the meaning of ‘expiation’.

4. The ‘hilaskomai’-group in the LXX and Translations of Hebrew ‘kipper’

1. *Hilaskomai*. The verb *hilaskomai* ‘propitiate’, ‘make propitiation’ in various forms occurs 12 times in the LXX translation of the Old Testament. Apart from one reference (Esth 4:17h), which has no Hebrew original, it translates three different Hebrew words: *naham* ‘to regret’, ‘to change one’s mind’; (b) *salach* ‘to be indulgent towards’, ‘to forgive’ and (c) *kipper* ‘to propitiate’.

a. *naham* ‘to regret’, ‘to change one’s mind’. In Ex 32:14 we read: “And the Lord regretted the evil that He had said He would do to His people”. This change of mind on the part of the Lord followed directly on Moses’ prayer, that is, Moses soothed the wrath of the Lord by his prayer and the Lord changed His attitude toward Israel. The Hellenic word (*hilasthē* ‘became propitious’), therefore, rightly expresses the meaning in this context.

b. In seven texts *hilaskomai* translates the Hebrew *salach* ‘to be indulgent towards’, ‘to forgive’⁵⁸. The idea involved in forgiving is intimately connected with a change of personal attitude, in other words, it is the result of having become propitiated. I 2 Kg 5:18 the *KJV* and the *RSV* translate with ‘pardon’. Similarly in 2 Kg 24:4 God refused to *be propitiated* in the case of King Joakim’s sins. In Solomon’s prayer, at the dedication of the temple (2 Chr 6:30), God is besought to be

⁵⁸ So, L. KOEHLER- W. BAUMGARTNER, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, p.757.

propitiated/to forgive the people, if they turn from their sin. This has been preceded by the related expression ‘be propitious’ in vv. 21, 25 and 27.⁵⁹ In Ps 25 (LXX 24):11 David prays: “For the sake of Thy name, Lord, *be propitious/forgive* my sin, for it is great”. According to Lam 3:42: “We have sinned, we have rebelled and Thou hast not *been favorable/propitious [to us]/forgiven us*”, evidently because of lack of true repentance. Finally, in Dan 9:19 Daniel confesses on behalf of the people their sin and says: “Lord hear [us], Lord have mercy/be propitious, Lord give heed and act”. It is quite clear from the above texts that the Hebrew *salach* does not have sin as its object (that is, it does not expiate sin) but has to do with the person of God, i.e. with propitiating Him and making Him favorable, merciful, forgiving toward His people.

c. *kipper* ‘to propitiate’. Finally, in three cases *hilaskomai* translates the Hebrew *kipper*. Ps 65 (LXX 64):4; 78 (LXX 77):38 and 79 (LXX 78):9 all are translated in the RSV by ‘forgive’, which is a good dynamic equivalent of ‘be propitious’, ‘change your attitude’. What is, however, peculiar in the last three instances is that the object is the dative of ‘sins’. It seems that God is invoked to be propitious toward their sins or towards them in regard to their sins.

2. *Hilasmos*. The term *hilasmos* translates four Hebrew words: *kippurim*, *selicha*, *ashima* and *chatath*.

The first word, *kippurim*, together with the word for ‘day’, i.e. *yom kippurim*, occurs in Lev 25:9. The LXX translates it as *hēmera hilasmou*, which has been commonly translated as ‘Day of atonement’. But this will be discussed in more detail below. Num 5:8 legislates about restitution for wrong done. If there is no near relative to whom restitution can be made, then he must make restitution to the Lord by way of the priest, in addition to “the ram of *kippurim* – propitiation/atonement”. In 1 Chr 28:20, a reading found only in some LXX manuscripts but not in the Hebrew text at all, speaks of “house of *hilasmos*” = ‘house of propitiation’, referring to the Jerusalem temple.

The second word, *selicha* from the verb *salach* ‘to forgive’, occurs twice: in Ps 129:4, it is quite obvious that affront to God’s person is involved: “If thou shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee”, in other words, You let Yourself

⁵⁹ Hellenic *hileōs esēi*.

be propitiated. The second occurrence of this word is met with in the Theodotion version⁶⁰ of Daniel's Hellenic text, where it is rendered by the plural form of *hilasmos*. In his prayer, Daniel makes confession of the sins of his people and counts upon the clemency of God: "To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness". Forgiveness implies a changed attitude on God's part, in other words the idea of propitiation is intrinsic to forgiveness.

The third word translated by *hilasmos* is *ashema* which means 'guilt' or 'indebtedness': "Those who swear by the *guilt* of Samaria" (Am 8:14). The *KJV* and the Swedish *Bibel 2000*, renders it with "sin of Samaria"; the *Die Bibel* (revised Luther) (1985) and the Neohellenic translation (1999) with "idol of Samaria", the *NIV* with "shame of Samaria" while *RSV* and *JB* with "Samaria's Ashimah".⁶¹ It is not immediately clear why the LXX translators rendered this word with *hilasmos*. It may be that they had a different edition of the Hebrew text.

Finally, Ez 44:27 demands of the priests who are to go into the sanctuary to minister to the Lord that they offer a '*chatath*'. This term means 'sin', but here, as elsewhere, it can also cover the offering for sin. Inasmuch as the sin-offering was to appease God, the term *hilasmos* was a proper translation.

A few other occurrences of *hilasmos* in the LXX do not have a Hebrew original behind them: 1 Chr 28:20 (see above), the apocryphal Sirach 18:20 and 35:3, and 2 Mac 3:33. Sir 18:20 "Examine yourself before [the] judgement, and in the hour of visitation you will find *favor/mercy*". 35:3: "God's good pleasure is that you abstain from evil and [His] *favor* is to abstain from injustice". 2 Mac 3:33 speaks of the propitiation offering which the high priest Onias performed for the gentile Heliodoros' recovery from illness.

In none of the above texts that speak of *hilasmos* is the meaning of 'expiation' demanded. On the contrary, the meaning of making propitiation, or making someone propitious or favorable so that forgiveness can be granted, seems to be the natural meaning in each case.

⁶⁰ The Theodotion version of the Old Testament in Hellenic exists for the whole of Daniel's book, and its text is considered superior to the text of the LXX of Daniel.

⁶¹ On this name and its possible reference to various divinities, see *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 Vols., 1992, Vol. 1, p. 487.

3. *Hilastērion*. This word occurs 26 times in the LXX. The first occurrence is Ex 25:16, in whose context God gives directions to Moses on how to make the sanctuary. The relevant verse says that Moses is to make a *hilastērion epithema*. The second word no doubt means ‘covering’, so that *hilastērion* covering refers to the lid of the ark which functioned as the place for *hilasmos*.⁶² In twenty of its occurrences *hilastērion* refers to the lid of the ark (Heb. *kapporeth*). It has been customary to render this word in English as ‘mercy-seat’, since it was there that the high priest found favour with God, when he received His forgiveness for the people. One occurrence, Am 9:1, has no Hebrew equivalent, while in the last five instances *hilastērion* translates the Hebrew word *ezarah*, ‘border’, ‘ledge’. These instances are all in Ezekiel’s vision of the temple (Ez 43).

4. *Exilaskomai*, *exilasmos*, *exilastērios* and Hebrew *kapar*, *kipper*, *kopher*, and *kippurim*. The verb *exilaskomai* occurs 105 times in the LXX, translating *kipper* 83 times, and for the rest several other verbs. This ought to mean that it was considered the nearest equivalent to *kipper*. The form *kipper* derives from the root *kapar*, whose precise meaning is disputed, but which seems to lie between ‘to cover’ and ‘to wash away’.⁶³ The word *kipper* is closely associated with the word *kopher* (in Hebrew both words are spelled identically – *kpr* – since the ‘vowel’ differentiations were added later). Moreover, *kipper* occurs often in cultic sense of the priests’ sacrificial rites, but sometimes also in non-cultic sense. Both Herrmann and Morris are of the opinion that the meaning of *kipper* ought to be sought in its non-cultic usage, since the technical cultic usage must have grown out of the ordinary secular usage. In addition, the close connection of *kipper* (expiate/propitiate) and *kopher* (ransom) must be made the point of departure.

To take a few examples, Ex 30:12–16 lays down that at the census each Israelite is to “give a ransom for himself to the Lord (*kopher*

⁶² On the meaning and description of the *hilastērion* or *kapporeth*, see STRACK-BILLERBECK, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash*, Vol. III, p. 165–85. During the second temple period, in the absence of ark and *kapporeth*, the blood was sprinkled on a stone called *eben shetiyyah* = ‘foundation stone’. See also M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, New York 1989, p. 1638.

⁶³ See J. HERRMANN, art. ἵλεως etc. in *TDNT*, Vol. III, p. 302: “There are Semitic analogies for regarding forgiveness of sins both in terms of covering [see e.g. Gen 32:21] and in terms of washing away [see e.g.]”.

naphsho laYHWH) ... that there be no plague among them ... to make atonement/propitiation [*kipper*] for yourselves ... and you will take the money of (expiation)/propitiation [*keseph hakippurim*] ...” Here, the atonement/propitiation takes place by the paying of a ransom [*kopher*] which is also called ‘(expiation)/propitiation money’! Job 33:24 and 36:18 also speaks of *kopher* as a ransom for the life of man. The same is the case in Prov 6:35 “the ransom [*kopher*]”; 13:8 “ransom [*kopher*] for a man’s life”, while the same thought is expressed by the use of *peduyim* [‘redemption money’] in Num 3:46, 48, 49, 51. In Prov 21:8 and Isa 43:3-4 *kopher* clearly carries the idea of substitute.

In Isa 47:11 the verb “*kipper* means to pay *kopher* [ransom], to raise a *kopher*, to avert by *kopher* ... What is at issue is the averting of complete destruction”.⁶⁴ This implies the idea of propitiation. In a similar way Jacob’s gifts to Esau (Gen 32:20) are intended to propitiate him (*kipper*; LXX: *exilaskomai*) – so, too, *KJV* and *RSV*. At Ex 32:30 Moses wants to make expiation/propitiation [*kipper*] for the people by offering his own life. Thus, life for life! The same point is emphasized in Num 35:33–44, where nothing can be given to atone for/propitiate (*kipper*) a murderer, except his own life. “It appears that, when *kipper* is used in the Old Testament to denote the making of an atonement by means other than the use of the cultus, it usually bears the meaning ‘to avert punishment, especially the divine anger, by the payment of a *kopher*, a ransom’, which may be of money or which may be of life”.⁶⁵

This brief examination of the close relation between ‘*kipper*–to atone/propitiate’ and ‘*kopher*–ransom’, perhaps indicates how the atonement came to be conceived in Israel. The animal’s blood was shed in order to avert the shedding of the sinner’s blood. The atonement was also necessary because of God’s impending judgement. The very idea of atonement carries with it the idea of propitiation. As Morris expresses it “It would seem that the verb *kipper* carries with it the implication of a turning away of the divine wrath by an appropriate offering”.⁶⁶

In classical times the compound verb *exilaskomai* – like the simple *hilaskomai* – had normally a divinity (or even a man) as its object and

⁶⁴ HERRMANN, *TDNT*, Vol. III, p. 303.

⁶⁵ MORRIS, *The Apostolic Preaching*, p. 166.

⁶⁶ MORRIS, *The Apostolic Preaching*, p. 170.

its meaning was ‘propitiate’, ‘appease’.⁶⁷ In the LXX, as noted above, it usually translates *kipper*, when the priest offers about/with respect to the sin of the people. It is interesting that ‘sin’ is normally not the direct object of the verb, since for the most part the preposition *peri* is used, that is, whatever the priest does is ‘about’ or ‘with respect to’ sin. This might imply ‘make expiation with respect to sin’, but, on the other hand, it does not rule out the sense ‘make propitiation with respect to sin’. Büchsel comments: From this “a personal as well as a cultic sense arises: ‘to make gracious’.”⁶⁸ Thus, in Zech 7:2; 8:22 and Mal 1:9, where the subject is man and God is the object *exilaskomai* (rendering Hebrew *chillah*) means ‘to placate by prayer’, ‘to make favorable’. So, too, Gen 32:21, although the object here is a man (Esau), the subject being Jacob.

The interesting thing here is that while *hilaskomai*, and its cognates regularly carry the meaning of ‘propitiate’, ‘appease’, ‘placate’, the compound *exilaskomai* covers also the cultic ritual performed by the priest, an action whereby he presumably expiates the people’s sin, but which action has as its aim the appeasing of God. It should also be noted that ‘Day of atonement’ is in the LXX called mostly by the more ambiguous *hēmera exilasmou*, rather than *hēmera ilasmou* = ‘Day of propitiation’.

In popular Neohellenic *hilaskomai* and *exilaskomai* are defunct, though *hilasmos* and *exilasmos* are still in use. The idea of ‘propitiate’ is expressed by the ancient *exileō*, which has taken the form *exileōnō* (active voice) and ‘propitiation’ by *exileōsi(s)*. The active is used of propitiating someone wronged, and the middle/passive of ‘expiating one’s own wrong’. Perhaps this helps us understand the close connection between the concepts of expiation and propitiation, and why *exilaskomai* shows this ambiguity in meaning. This ambiguity is facilitated by the fact that the same action of the priest leads to the expiation of sins and to the propitiation of the deity.

⁶⁷ See e.g. Herodotos, *Histories*, VII, 141 and Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, VII, 2. 19; Hecataeus (IV-II B.C.), *Fragmenta*, 3a, 264.F.25.726; Theopompos (IV B.C.), *Testimonia*, 2b., 11, T.11.6 – all of propitiating a deity.

⁶⁸ BÜCHSEL, *TDNT*, Vol. II, p. 315.

5. *The Biblical Idea of Propitiation*

As we saw above, the Biblical idea of propitiation is quite different to the corresponding idea in ancient Hellenic religion. Therefore, Dodd's argument that the God of the Bible does not have any wrath that needs to be propitiated, since He is not like the gods of the Hellenic pantheon, is gratuitous. Dodd's objection to propitiation and his preference for expiation alerts us to the need of properly defining the relevant terms. This is especially important since in general, lexica, both Hellenic and English, seem to offer a rather unclear picture of the semantic fields of the relevant terms. All three standard lexica of the Hellenic language give 'propitiation' as the basic meaning of the *hilask*-group.⁶⁹ As a secondary sense, they also give the meaning of 'expiation', but it is noteworthy that they cite as their only example for this meaning Heb 2:17!⁷⁰ In other words, in the entire Hellenic literature there is no occurrence of the *hilask*-group of words with the sense of 'expiation'! In addition to all this, it is sometimes difficult to know in which sense the term 'atonement' is used in writing – as 'reconciliation' or as 'expiation'. A clarification of our terminology is therefore in order.

1. 'Expiation' has as its object a thing: sin – signifying that one pays for the wrong one has done.

2. 'Propitiation' has as its object a person: God or man – that is, by appropriate means one appeases the wrath of the wronged person.

3. 'Reconciliation' means restoring a previously broken relationship between the wrong-doer and the wronged person.

The word-group *hilaskomai-hilasmos-hilastērion*, as we have already seen, has properly the meaning of 'propitiate'-'propitiation'-'propitiatory'. The same goes for the most part of the intensified forms *exhilaskomai-exhilasmos-exhilastērion*. In ancient Hellenic religion the

⁶⁹ Δ. ΔΗΜΗΤΡΑΚΟΥ, *Μέγα Λεξικὸν ὅλης τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Γλώσσης*, 9 Vols., Athens 1964, Vol. IV, p. 3437; Liddell-Scott-Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford 1953, p. 828; F. Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, Leiden 2015, pp. 974 f.

⁷⁰ The meaning of Heb 2:17 has been treated above. That all three lexica give the same reference, does not add up to three witnesses, since it is well known that lexica build on (and copy) one another.

object of propitiation is invariably a god or goddess, but ancient literature offers occasional examples of ‘propitiating’ also a human.⁷¹

The concept of ‘propitiation’ immediately raises the question of the presence of wrath that needs to be ‘propitiated’ or ‘averred’, which has been roundly denied by Dodd and his followers.

According to the Biblical evidence all sin of man, even one that has been committed against another person, is, in the final analysis committed against God. This is so, because God is the Creator, to whom all creatures are liable and accountable. As Creator God has set rules by which men ought to live. When they break these rules through their sin, men not only malfunction – as we see today exemplified by all kinds of perversions – they also revolt against the order of God, and by revolting, they become enemies of God (Rm 5:10; Eph 2:3). The sin of man is an affront against the all-holy and all-righteous God. And since God is “of purer eyes than to behold evil” (Hab 1:13), He cannot to put up with sin. Sin, therefore, arouses God’s wrath.

Unlike the wrath of man, which is based on selfish motives and takes the form of an outbreak, a fury, or a rage, which with time subsides,⁷² God’s wrath is His settled attitude against all that is contrary to His holiness and righteousness. And it can only be appeased by the removal of whatever arouses it. The wrath of God, therefore, is a necessary consequence of the violation of His holiness and righteousness, which cannot be yoked together with sin and injustice. Because of this, the propitiation of God is a necessary category in the scheme of salvation.

Now, the reason why the concepts of ‘propitiation’ and ‘expiation’ are not always clearly distinguished is that they are so closely related that they cannot be separated Hermetically. They somehow co-exist, since they are two sides or consequences of the same process. In other words, the action of payment or restitution or satisfaction for the wrong

⁷¹ See e.g. Herodotos, *Histories* VIII.112 “But the Parians having propitiated Themistoklēs with money avoided [having to face] his army”.

⁷² There is a case in which humans, too, may on occasion exhibit a wrath that is not self-seeking. We call it ‘righteous indignation’ or ‘holy wrath’.

done leads, on the one hand, to *expiation* and, on the other hand, to *propitiation*.⁷³

If one who has committed a crime pays for it by being punished, this payment or punishment is his *expiation*. By paying for it, he *expiates* his crime. Now, this crime has been committed against someone else. And this someone else is offended by the crime done against him. However, when the wrongdoer has paid for his crime, this payment is a satisfaction given to the wronged person. Thus, by giving satisfaction, the wrongdoer *appeases* or *placates*, that is, *propitiates* the wronged person. This implies that from one and the same action – the payment for the crime by the wrongdoer – we get two results: the crime is *expiated* and the wronged person is *propitiated*. The final result of the action, whereby the wrongdoer paid for (or *expiated*) his wrongdoing and thus *propitiated* the wronged person, is that the wrongdoer and the wronged person are *reconciled*. Accordingly, here we have three ideas: an act of *expiation*, that leads to *propitiation*, the consequence of which is *reconciliation*.

Now, if we apply this to the work of Christ on the cross, we find that through his death Christ (a) *expiates* our sin, that is, he ‘washes our sins’,⁷⁴ or he “blots out our transgressions”,⁷⁵ so that they do not bear witness against us,⁷⁶ (b) he *propitiates* God, averting His wrath⁷⁷ by having taken away the obstacle⁷⁸ and making Him propitious and merciful toward us,⁷⁹ and through these two actions (c) he *reconciles* us to God⁸⁰.

⁷³ Hence, dictionaries of the various European language do not distinguish clearly between the two meanings.

⁷⁴ The Bible uses various imageries of God’s dealing with our sin, see e.g. Isa 1:18 and Ps 51:7 of washing sins and making them whiter than snow.

⁷⁵ Another imagery is that of blotting out our sins: Ps 51:1, 9, Isa 43:25; 44:22: “I have blotted out ... thy transgression”.

⁷⁶ See Isa 59:12: “our sins testify against us”; Col 2:14: “having obliterated/wiped out the handwriting that was against us”.

⁷⁷ Rm 5:9: “much more having been justified through his blood, we shall be saved through him from the wrath [of God]”.

⁷⁸ Isa 59:2: “Your iniquities have separated between you and your God and your sins have hid His face from you”.

⁷⁹ 1 Th 1:10: “Jesus who saves us from the wrath to come”.

⁸⁰ Rm 5:10: “If when we were sinner we were reconciled to God ...”; 2 Cor 5:19: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself”.

The above is in brief the Biblical understanding of the work of Christ on the cross. The idea of expiation is in the New Testament expressed by the verb *katharizō* = ‘to cleanse’ and the substantive *katharismos* = ‘cleansing’. There are primarily six texts in which the action of ‘cleansing’ is directed to sin. It is these texts that are important for the present question. Eph 5:26 speaks of Christ’s love for the Church, which made him give himself in order to sanctify her by *cleansing* her with the bath of water (which consists) in the Word. The second text is Tit 2:14 “Who gave himself for us in order to redeem us from all lawlessness and cleanse [*katharisēi*] unto himself a people of his own possession”; Heb 9:14: “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, *cleanse/purge (katharizei)* our conscience from dead works, so that we may serve the living God”; Heb 10:2, speaking of the sacrifices in Israel’s cultus, claims that those sacrifices, which were offered year after year, could not free the Israelites of guilt, otherwise they would have ceased to be offered – since the worshippers would have been *cleansed* once and for all; 1 Jn 1:7: “The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses/purges (*katharizei*) us from all sin” and Heb 1:3: “Having made purification (*katharismos* – a substantive) for [our] sins”.

In the above texts the verb *katharizō* is used to express the effect that the shed blood of Christ had on the sin of man. The blood of Christ was shed in order to *cleanse* sin.

4. In addition, the prepositions *hyper*, *anti* and *peri* are also used of the death of Christ *for* us.

a. The first word, *hyper*, which occurs 150 times in the New Testament, is met for example, in Lk 22:19–20, when Jesus says that his body is given and his blood is poured out *hyper* (ὑπέρ, *for/for the sake of/on behalf of*) you. In Rm 5:8 Paul says: “God commends his love toward us in that while we were still sinners Christ died *hyper* (for/on behalf of/for the sake of) us”; Rm 8:32: “[God] ... who did not spare His own Son but gave him for [*hyper*] us all”; Rm 14:15: “Do not destroy him for [*hyper*] whom Christ died”; 1 Cor 11:24: “This is my body which is [broken] for [*hyper*] you”. Similarly, 2 Cor 5:14: “One [*sc.* Christ] died for (*hyper*) all” and Gal 2:20: “The Son of God ... loved me and offered himself for (*hyper*) my sake”.

b. *Peri* occurs 333 times in the New Testament. It has a wider range of meanings such as ‘for’, ‘about’, ‘round about’, ‘concerning’ but

when used of Christ's death for the sinner, its meaning is 'for' in the sense of taking away sin,⁸¹ as in Rm 8:3: "God sent His Son ... for [*peri*] sin and condemned sin"; Gal 1:4: "Jesus Christ who gave himself *for* (*peri* in many manuscripts; other manuscripts have *hyper*) our sins". So, too, 1 Pt 3:18: "Christ suffered once *for* (*peri*) our sins ... that he might bring us to God".

c. *Anti*, which occurs 22 times in the New Testament, bears the sense of 'for'/'instead of'. Thus, the old rule according to Mt 5:38 was: "An eye *for* (*anti*) an eye", the meaning being that if one had caused someone to lose his eye, then he should pay for it by having his own eye plucked out. In other words, he should give his own eye *instead of* or in *place of* the eye he had destroyed. For the christological use of this preposition we may refer to Mt 20:28: "The Son of Man ... came to serve and to give his life as a ransom *for* (*anti*) many". Similarly Mk 10:45. Here, the meaning is that the many themselves should have paid for their sin by giving up their life, i.e. paying for their guilt by dying. However Christ offers to give his own life *instead of/for* or in *exchange for* their life. 1 Tim 2:6 offers an even more emphasized saying by combining the preposition *anti* with *lytron* as one word and strengthening the idea further by adding *hyper*: "Christ Jesus who gave/offered himself as *counter-ransom* (*antilytron*) *for/instead of* (*hyper*) them".⁸²

The two prepositions *hyper* and *anti*, which both can be translated by 'for', lay the emphasis on the substitution that is involved in the death of Christ. Thus, in Mk 10:45 and Mt 20:28 the meaning of 'ransom' (*lytron*) is underlined by the preposition *anti*: Christ offers himself as a ransom by taking the sinners' place!

Finally, also the word for 'ransom', i.e. *lytron* (pl. *lytra*) refers to the expiatory death of Jesus. Echoing such Old Testament conceptions of ransom as are found in e.g. Ex 30:12; Isa 44:22; 52:3; 62:12; 63:9; Hos 13:14; especially Isa 53:10–12 (in which the term itself is missing), Mk 10:45 says: "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom (*lytron*) for many". The same saying occurs at Mt 20:28. *Lytron* (pl. *lytra*) is the price money one pays in order to redeem

⁸¹ See W. BAUR-F.W. DANKER, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago 2000, p.798.

⁸² Hellenic ἀντίλυτρον (pron.: *antilytron*).

or free someone from his rightful owner, for example, a slave from his master.

In the above Hellenic terminology the picture is different from the picture that is evoked in English. In English, *expiation* is payment for guilt or amends for wrong done.⁸³ If this were to be literally expressed in the case of the sinner, it would imply the death of the sinner, for only such a death could make adequate payment.⁸⁴ In the original text of the New Testament the equivalent imagery is different. Here, the sinner does not expiate his sin, since this is impossible. It is someone else who takes the sinner's place. Thus, the Hellenic text uses the substitutionary prepositions *anti*, *hyper*, and *peri* all meaning 'for' or 'instead of' as well as *lytron* = 'ransom'. In these prepositions we have the idea of substitution. Instead of us dying in order to pay for our sin, Christ dies in our place. This – along with 'cleansing' – is expiation!

The idea of 'propitiation', as has been shown above, is expressed by the *hilask-* group of words. In the New Testament words from this stem occur quite sparingly: the verb *hilaskomai* 'to make propitiation', in Lk 18:13, where a sinner asks God to be propitious/merciful to him; Heb 2:17 was noted above; *hilastērion* in Rm 3:25 and Heb 9:5, will be treated below; and *hilasmos* 'propitiation' in 1 Jn 2:2 and 4:10.⁸⁵ In 1 Jn 2:2 comforting and exhorting anyone who might have fallen into sin, the author says that if this happens, we have Jesus Christ, who is a propitiation *with respect to [peri] our sins*. The construction puts it beyond doubt that Christ is here depicted in his function of intercessor with the Father or as a mediator,⁸⁶ not as one who expiates sin. Even if he had used "a propitiation *of our sins*", without *peri* ('in respect to') the meaning would still be the same. In 1 Jn 4:10 we have again exactly the same construction: "God sent His Son as a propitiation *with respect to [peri] our sins*".

The idea of 'reconciliation' is expressed by *katallassō* and *katallagē*. For example, in active sense, Christ by his death reconciles us to the Father: 1 Cor 5:19: "God was in Christ reconciling the world

⁸³ The verb 'expiate' signifies making amends for a wrong done. The word comes from Latin *expiatus*, past participle of *expiare* = 'make amends', which in turn is derived from *ex* = 'completely' and *piare* = 'propitiate', 'appease'.

⁸⁴ Ez 18:20: "The soul that sins, it shall die".

⁸⁵ The term *hileōs* = 'propitious' is met twice: Mt 16:22 and Heb 8:12.

⁸⁶ Cf 1 Tim 2:5: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus".

unto Himself”; Eph 2:16: “and to reconcile both [Jews and Gentiles] in one body to God”, while in passive sense, we *are reconciled* to the Father (Rm :10. “if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son ...”).

Disregarding the evidence of the New Testament, some scholars, influenced by Dodd’s teaching, which also happens to be in tune with certain modern tendencies, argue that God has no wrath and therefore does not need to be propitiated. God is love, they say. This sounds very pious and Christian-like, but it hides an ugly and insidious fact, a theology that is contrary to the New Testament teaching, and that for the following reasons:

1. If the terms *hilasmos*, etc. had changed their meaning in the New Testament, then this change ought to be valid for Hellenic literature in post-New Testament times. The fact, however, is, that *hilasmos* etc., as was noted earlier, still have the same sense in Byzantine Hellenic, in medieval Hellenic, as well as Neohellenic (*Katharevousa*) as they had in ancient Hellenic literature! Dodd and his followers have not examined the Hellenic language and its literature as a whole. Their interpretation is simply the meaning they wish that the New Testament had, not the meaning that the New Testament actually has.

2. Moreover, the question is here raised: why did God not save man quite simply by His love – if He had no wrath? Why was it necessary for His Son, a part of Himself, to die on the cross? Why this incomprehensibly, unimaginably immense sacrifice – if God was not offended by the sin of man, if the sin of man was no problem to Him? And why did God abandon His Son on the cross, turning His face away from him at the moment he bore the sins of man (cf. Mt 27:46: “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”)? On the contrary, the cry of dereliction on the cross points to the severity of God against sin, as Christ stood there as representative of man, cf. 2 Cor 5:21: “For our sake, He [God] made him [Christ] to be sin (– offering?) who knew no sin ...”

3. And if – let us suppose – Jesus had not made purification for sins by giving Himself up on the cross, what would have been God’s attitude to the sinner? If Jesus had not died, would God still forgive the sinner? Dare we claim this? Such a claim would falsify the entire message of the New Testament about salvation! The answer surely is:

Certainly not! For if He could, He would have done it! His holiness and righteousness stood in the way of forgiveness. Here we have the dilemma of God!⁸⁷

4. Neither would reconciliation have taken place between God and man. Why? Because sin is not simply an indifferent thing that can be disregarded but an action – an action that offends someone. It is impossible to separate an action from him who perpetrated it and from him against whom it was perpetrated. Sin is a personal offence against God’s holiness and righteousness. Therefore, those who advocate the thesis that Christ’s death on the cross was simply an expiatory sacrifice for sin or an expression of God’s love and nothing more have not appreciated the depth of the problem. Sin is considered sin because of its ethical relation to a personal God. That which makes it sin is its relation to the moral and ethical law of God. If God and his ethical/moral law did not exist, nothing would be regarded as sin (cf. Rm 7:7). And since this is not so, does it not also imply that since God cannot tolerate sin, it would stand as a hindrance for God to accept and welcome the sinner in His arms?

Can we, then, in the face of all these problems and objections still maintain that the term *hilasmos* in the New Testament has lost its original meaning of *appeasement* or *propitiation*, and been reduced to the meaning of *expiation*?

The above objections, in addition to the evidence presented earlier in this study, make the proposed interpretation quite impossible. It is obvious that God’s forgiveness could not be given lightly and flippantly, as if God were characterized by flippancy and lack of seriousness, when His holiness had been offended. The weight of sin as also the indescribable offence against the holiness and righteousness of God could not find restitution through a lesser sacrifice than the offering of the sinless Son of God on the cross,⁸⁸ which in regard to sin it was an *expiatory sacrifice*, in regard to God it wrought *propitiation*, and the result of the two was *reconciliation* between God and man.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ See my book *Huvudpunkter i Paulus undervisning*, kap four, pp. 51–66.

⁸⁸ Cf. Heb 10:4: “For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins”.

⁸⁹ See also L. MORRIS, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, esp. pp. 144–213 as well as L. MORRIS, *The Cross in the New Testament*, esp. pp. 208–259.

6. *Hilastērion* in Rm 3:25

We now turn to the very important text in the Epistle to the Romans, Rm 3:25. The singular form of the word *hilastērion* in our text, may be a masculine adjective in the accusative case, a neuter adjective in the nominative or the accusative or a masculine noun in the accusative. Cranfield, who has written the most important commentary on Romans in English, presents the options succinctly and appositively:

We may set aside as unlikely to be correct, in view of what we have seen in the last paragraph and also of the fact that the wrath of God is prominent in the preceding section ... the various suggestions ... which are expressly intended to exclude the idea of propitiation. The remaining possibilities are: (i) ‘propitiatory’ or ‘propitiating ...; (ii) ‘a propitiator’; (iii) ‘a propitiation’ or ‘a means of propitiation’; (iv) ‘a propitiatory sacrifice’. Of these (ii) should probably be rejected ... on the ground that there does not seem to be any independent attestation of such a use of *hilastērion* in ancient times ... Between the other three possibilities there would seem to be little substantial difference, since, even if the word is explained as having one of the more general senses (i) and (iii), the presence of “in his blood” would still indicate that a propitiatory sacrifice is in mind. On the whole it seems best to accept (iv).⁹⁰

Parenthetically, it might be mentioned here that L. Morris, in his important study, in which he has proved beyond any reasonable doubt the untenability of Dodd’s position, rejects any connection of *hilastērion* in Rm 3:25 with the so-called Day of ‘atonement’ and in particular with the lid of the ark on which the high priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrificed animals and which has been called the ‘mercy seat’. Instead, he thinks *hilastērion* in Rm 3:25 should be understood in the light of IV Mac 17:22, which speaks of the death of seven brothers in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes as a *hilastērios* death, i.e. as a ‘propitiation’ for the whole nation.⁹¹

Without denying the validity of the wording of IV Mac 17:22, whose idea fits the idea of Christ’s sacrifice perfectly, the Romans passage contains, however, too many important allusions to the Day of ‘Atonement’ to set the latter aside as irrelevant.

⁹⁰ CRANFIELD, *Romans I*, pp. 216-7.

⁹¹ MORRIS, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, pp. 197 f.

The Hebrew terms corresponding to the Hellenic words we are considering go back to the Semitic root *kapar*, which probably had the sense of ‘to cover’.⁹² The word occurs in a certain Hebrew grammatical conjugation that is called *piel*. Thus, our word from the root *kapar* becomes *kipper*. As was noted above, the Septuagint (= LXX) renders this word by [*ex*]hilaskomai. The annual celebration when God forgave the sins of the entire nation of Israel was called in Hebrew *yom kippourim*, in the LXX *hēmera exilasmou* and in English “Day of atonement” (see Lev 23:27 f.). This celebration is described in Lev 16:1–34. On that day, the high priest, having offered a bullock and a goat, took a little of the blood of the sacrificed animals, went into the Holy of Holies – at first in the tabernacle but later in the temple – and sprinkled the blood on the ark of the covenant, that is, on the golden cover of the ark, which in Hebrew was called *kapporeth* = ‘covering’.⁹³ This is what the LXX translated into Hellenic as *hilastērion* and English versions normally render as ‘mercy-seat’ (see also Heb 9:5 the cherubim of glory overshadowing the *hilastērion* = ‘mercy seat’).⁹⁴ As we saw above, the LXX renders the first instance of *kapporeth* in Ex 25:17 by *hilastērion epithēma*, the second word meaning ‘cover’, in other words, a cover (over the ark) that functioned as a place of propitiation or as a ‘mercy-seat’, where the high priest found remission for the sins of the people. All other references to this ‘mercy-seat’ in the LXX have only the simplex *hilastērion*.

⁹² See e.g. F. BROWN-S.R. DRIVER-C.A. BRIGGS, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Oxford, 1978, p. 497 and KOEHLER – BAUMGARTNER, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Vol. II pp. 493–495. Some scholars have also suggested the meaning of ‘wash away’, see above.

⁹³ BROWN-DRIVER-BRIGGS, *Hebrew-English Lexicon*, p. 498, describes it as follows: “It was a slab of gold ... placed on top of the ark of the testimony. On it, and a part of it, were two golden cherubim facing each other, whose outstretched wings came together above and constituted the throne of Yahweh. When the high priest entered the Holy of Holies on the day of atonement it was necessary that this highest place of atonement should be enveloped in a cloud of incense. The blood of the sin-offering of the atonement was then sprinkled on the face of and seven times before it. The temple proper, as distinguished from porch etc., was called *bayith hakkapporeth* [= ‘House of the mercy-seat’] 1 Chr 28:11”

⁹⁴ This has the support of the standard Hebrew lexicon, KOEHLER – BAUMGARTNER, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, Vol. II pp. 493–495.

On the so-called Day of ‘atonement’ we must recognize two main events: expiation and propitiation. Since expiation means ‘payment’ for sin or crime it could not possibly have taken place in the Holy of Holies, where the high priest sprinkled the mercy seat. Expiation took place outside the temple, on the altar, where the sacrificial animals were slaughtered on behalf of the people and the scape goat, carrying the sins of the people, was sent away. When the high priest entered the Holy of Holies, he presented the blood before the mercy seat, which symbolized the throne of God. The approach of the high priest with the blood before the throne of God must be regarded as the climax of the ceremony. Thus, the sprinkling of the blood on the mercy-seat, which represented the presence of God, was the aim or end of the whole ritual. There, the high priest succeeded in averting Yahweh’s wrath and receiving His forgiveness for the whole nation. This climactic act gave the name to the entire ceremony of that day, which was called *Yom kippurim*.

The term *Yom kippurim* was rendered in the *KJV* by “Day of atonement”, which at that time meant “Day of reconciliation”. In current English, however, ‘atonement’ refers not to reconciliation but to the payment made – through the killing of the animals – for the sins of the people, in other words, it refers to the first part of the ceremony, the *expiation* that took place on the altar. Other languages, however, continue to use ‘reconciliation’ as the name of the entire ceremony; for example, German: “Versöhnungstag”; Swedish: “Försoningsdagen”, Dutch: “verzoendag”, while the French calls it “jour des expiations”. One may well wonder here: Was this a day of expiation, or a day of reconciliation or a day of propitiation? Thus, while the English and French designations refer to what happened at the altar (expiation), the German, Swedish and Dutch designations think primarily of what happened inside the Holy of Holies (reconciliation)! The Hebrew certainly refers to what happened when the high priest stood before the throne of Yahweh and sprinkled the blood on the mercy-seat and calls it *Yom kippurim*. This Hebrew expression, as we have already seen, does not mean ‘reconciliation’ nor unambiguously ‘expiation’ but is connected with the thought of propitiation and forgiveness. This finds confirmation in the LXX, which, hitting the nail on its head, rightly translates *yom kippurim* with Hellenic *hēmera exilasmou*, which means

nothing other than ‘Day of propitiation’. It must be emphasized that the expiation was the presupposition for the propitiation.

It is noteworthy that the Hebrew text never uses ‘to reconcile’ or ‘reconciliation’ to designate what happened on *Yom kippurim*. The LXX uses *katallassō* once in Jer 31 (48):39 in the sense of a person ‘changing’ and the substantive *katallagē* once in Isa 9:5 (4) evidently of the change of clothing. Our words occur in their ordinary Hellenic sense of ‘reconciliation’ only in the apocryphal 2 Maccabees.

The above data ought to imply that the Hebrews did not think of the *Yom kippurim* as a reconciliation, but as a propitiation of God – which presupposed a previous expiation – on the basis of which God granted them His forgiveness. Reconciliation is a New Testament concept, awaiting for the true expiation on the cross, the true propitiation when Christ ascended to the Father and the true reconciliation, which was the result and crown of Christ’s saving work.

In view of the above, in Rm 3:25 Christ’s offer of himself corresponds to the *propitiatory sacrifice*. The phrase “in his blood” clearly supports the idea that Christ’s death, according to Paul, corresponds to the *hilastērion* sacrifice = the *propitiatory sacrifice*.

7. What Is Paul Teaching in Rm 3:25–26

We may translate these two verses as follows:

Rm 3:25: Whom God appointed/purposed as a *hilastērion* through faith by his blood, in order to demonstrate His righteousness. [This was necessary] on account of His having overlooked the sins that had been committed in the past.

3:26: during the time of God’s forbearance, [I repeat] in order to demonstrate his righteousness in the present time, so that He might be just/righteous and [at the same time] justifying him who believes in Jesus.

Verse 25a: *Whom God appointed/purposed as a hilastērion through faith by his blood*. The Hellenic verb here translated ‘appointed/purposed’ signifies chiefly ‘to place something before somebody’, ‘to present’, ‘to put forward’. In the middle voice (which is the case here) it means ‘to set forth’, ‘to show forth’, ‘to exhibit publicly’, ‘to

ordain/appoint', 'to design', 'to purpose', etc. In the present context, the meaning is either 'to set forth', 'to exhibit publicly', in which case it describes God's action in exhibiting publicly His only Son on the cross or it expresses the decision or purpose of God, whereby before the eternal ages in His purpose and plan He had appointed/ordained His Son to be a *hilastērion*. Both of these interpretations are possible. The question is: Which of the two does Paul intend here? The relevant verb (*protithemai*, in the middle voice) occurs three times in the New Testament. In Rm 1:13 it is used of Paul's previous plan, design or intention to visit Rome (i.e. he had *purposed/decided* to visit Rome), which, however, had heretofore not materialized. The second instance is our text in 3:25, and the third occurrence is Eph 1:9: "Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He had *purposed/intended/decided* in him".⁹⁵ In both texts, Rm 1:13 and Eph 1:9, the verb expresses a previous *intention, plan* or *purpose*. In Eph 1:9 the word actually refers to God's eternal *purpose* in Christ. The reference to God's eternal purpose finds support also in the substantive *prothesis*, which is derived from the same root as our verb. In theologically loaded texts it occurs of God's eternal plan or purpose. Thus, Rm 8:28 speaks of "those who are called according to His *purpose*" (*prothesis*). Eph 1:11 says "we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the *purpose* (*prothesis*) of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will", while in 3:10 he speaks of the Church being used in order to make known to the authorities and powers in the heavenlies "the manifold wisdom of God, according to the *purpose* (*prothesis*) of the ages", that is, "according to His eternal purpose."⁹⁶

The probability that also Rm 3:25 refers to God's eternal purpose rather than to the public exhibition of God's Son on the cross, is increased both by Paul's consistent use of the verb and the substantive

⁹⁵ For the meaning of this text see Chrys C. CARAGOUNIS, *The Ephesian Mysteryion: Meaning and Content* (CB 8), Lund, 1977, pp. 93 ff.

⁹⁶ The last reference of this word to God is 2 Tim 1:9, and it likewise refers to God's eternal purpose.

with this meaning as well as by other supportive evidence.⁹⁷ For example, Rev 13:8 presents God's Son as a "lamb slain before the foundation of the world". Moreover, we may also think of the Hebrew ritual that lies behind the description of Rm 3:25-6, i.e. the Day of 'atonement' or rather the 'Day of propitiation'. What happened in the Holy of Holies, when the High Priest sprinkled the blood on the mercy-seat was not open to the public eye (Lev 16:17). And there is no particular reason for Paul to emphasize the openness of the sacrifice of Christ *contra* the hiddenness of the sprinkling of blood on the mercy-seat. But there is every reason why Paul would emphasize here the eternal purpose or decision of God to make Christ a propitiation offering through faith by his blood – thereby abrogating the temporary cultus of Israel – in order to at last vindicate His righteousness for ever.

Verse 25b: in order to demonstrate His righteousness. [This was necessary], on account of His having overlooked the sins that had been committed in the past. This second part of verse 25 is the key to a correct interpretation of the first part of the verse, namely, whether we have here to do with the idea of propitiation or not. Here, Paul argues that the *hilastērios* sacrifice of Christ on the cross was necessary in order for God to demonstrate His righteousness, i.e. that He is righteous.⁹⁸

Now, why was it necessary for God to demonstrate that He was righteous? Because in old Israel on the 'Day of atonement', God had, so to speak, set aside His righteousness and His holiness in order to show His love and mercy to Israel. If God had not set aside the righteous demands of His holiness, Israel would have been wiped out already during the first year! "The soul that sins must die" had God said (Ez 18:20. See also Num 15:31 and Dt 24:16). In spite of this, the Israelites went on living and ... sinning! As the author of the epistle to the Hebrews expresses it, it was impossible for the blood of bulls and

⁹⁷ See also C.E.B. CRANFIELD's apposite remarks for this interpretation in *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* 2 Vols. (ICC), Edinburgh, 1977, Vol. I, 208–9.

⁹⁸ Some, i.a. A. NYGREN, *Commentary on Romans* (original: *Pauli brev till romarna*, 1944) London, 1952, think that 'righteousness' here as well as in 3:21–22 has the meaning of the righteous status that God gives, but as CRANFIELD, *Romans I*, 211, points out "God's being righteous" at the end v. 26" favors the view that God's own righteousness is meant.

goats to take away sins – that is, on the so-called ‘Day of atonement’! What was, then, happening on this day year after year? What was happening was precisely what the apostle Paul says was happening. On the ‘Day of expiation/propitiation’ God was passing over, that is, He was overlooking the sins of the people of Israel. Here we have a reminiscence of the first Passover in Ex. 12. The Israelites were to sprinkle some of the blood of the lamb or goat on their doorposts, so that the angel of God would see the blood: “And when I see the blood, I will pass over you” (12:13, 23). The sprinkling of the blood had certainly covered their sins (*kapparat!*), but they had not been taken away, they had not been wiped out, they had not ceased to exist. They had simply been covered provisionally, so God could not ‘see’ them, and did not need to punish the Israelites. But they were there!

Now, such a behavior on the part of God was not in harmony with His holiness and righteousness. God could not go on forever covering the sins of Israel and not giving satisfaction to His righteousness and holiness, which demanded Israel’s punishment. A day must come when God would put an end to this ‘comedy’ in Israel’s cult, a day when He would demonstrate His holiness and His righteousness by actually punishing once and for all the sins that had accumulated. This is the meaning of the Hellenic word *paresis*, which we translate by ‘passing by’ or ‘overlooking’ the sins committed in the past. God had, so to speak, overlooked, turned a blind eye to Israel’s sins. But this could not continue in perpetuity.

Verse 26a: during the time of God’s forbearance. This phrase belongs to the previous verse. The overlooking of the sins of Israel had taken place during the time that God showed His forbearance. That period was the period of God’s patience or forbearance with Israel in a similar manner as God in times past also had shown His forbearance to the gentiles: cf. Acts 14:16: “who in past generations let the gentiles go their own ways, although He did not leave Himself without witness, showing His benevolence [to them] ...” (Acts 14:16). God treated both Israelites and gentiles with benevolence and patience. But, note well, forbearance implies a problematic relation between God and Israel. God was displeased with Israel’s sin. However, His wrath was curbed by the temporary arrangement of *Yom kippurim*.

Verse 26b: [*I repeat*] in order to demonstrate his righteousness in the present time, so that He might be just/righteous and [*at the same time*] justifying him who believes in Jesus. The first phrase “in order to demonstrate His righteousness” resumes the almost identical phrase in the previous verse, hence the “I repeat” within square brackets. The iteration is for the purpose of underscoring the significance of God’s demonstration of His righteousness. This time the author adds also the important detail of time: “at the present time”, which refers to the death of Jesus on the cross. In other words, now something happens that had never happened before. The real redemption, the absolute forgiveness, the remission of sins without strings attached takes place now on the cross of Jesus for the first and the last time, once and for all. On the cross, God punishes sin in the person of His own Son, in this way demonstrating His holiness and righteousness, that is, His righteous judgment, which ought to have fallen on man, falls on His sinless Son (Isa 53:5–12; 1 Pt 2:21–24). At the same time God is in a position to free, to acquit the guilty, the sinner. It is this taking upon Himself the burden of man’s sin and its punishment that shows in the most exalted way the depth of God’s love for man. This is love! – “that he laid down his life for us” (1 Jn 3:16); “Hereby the love of God is revealed to us that He sent His only Son into the world so that we might live through him” (1 Jn 4:9); “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 Jn 4:10).

On the cross meet what to us humans appear as two opposite sides: that of the divine righteousness, which demands satisfaction (i.e. the death of the sinner) and that of the divine love, which does not want the perdition of the sinner. Accordingly, through Christ’s death on the cross, God proves His righteousness, that is, that He is righteous, which during the Hebrew cultic system had not received its satisfaction, and at the same time He satisfies the demand of His love, by justifying the sinner, i.e. pronouncing the sinner free and guiltless. Cranfield, who in some details differs somewhat, rightly concludes: “That He might justify righteously, without compromising His own righteousness. So understood, the words afford an insight into the innermost meaning of the Cross as Paul understands it and into his use of *hilastērion* in vs. 25 ... the purpose of Christ’s being *hilastērion* was to achieve a divine

forgiveness, which is worthy of God, consonant with His righteousness”.⁹⁹

It is hardly to be wondered at that the apostle to the gentiles, considering the inscrutable counsels of God, breaks out in exultation:

“O the depth of the riches
and the wisdom and the knowledge of God
how unsearchable are His judgments
and inscrutable His ways!” (Rm 11:33)

8. *Dodd's Teaching in Popular Attire*

In a recently published book, Mikael Tellbe, lecturer at the Örebro Theological School, touches on the theme of the present study.¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, he approaches the subject as a journalist who seeks to create impressions rather than as an impartial scholar open for wherever the evidence leads to. Already the first paragraph (not to mention the unacceptable title of the chapter¹⁰¹)

Is God angry? Is the death of Jesus the sacrifice that propitiates a wrathful God? Must God punish an innocent victim in order to be able to forgive man's sins?

shows that the author by his formulations tries to prejudice the issue from the outset by injecting into the reader's mind an aversion against the teaching he dislikes, which, as we have seen above, happens to be the teaching of the New Testament.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ CRANFIELD, *Romans*, I, 214.

¹⁰⁰ M. TELLBE, *Paulus mot vägen*, Stockholm, Libris, 2019.

¹⁰¹ Ch. 9: “Trodde Paulus på en Gud vars vrede måste stillas med offer?” (= “Did Paul believe in a God whose wrath must be placated by sacrifices?”)

¹⁰² The New Testament's answer to all of Tellbe's questions is “Yes”, but not in the way he construes them!, e.g. “Is God angry?”: cf. Rm 3:5: “Is God unrighteous/unjust who inflicts [His] *wrath on us*”; “Victim offered to God”: cf. Jn 18: “Shall I not drink the *cup* that *the Father has given me*?”; “Sacrifice to God”: cf. Eph 5:2: “Christ loved us and delivered himself up for us *an offer and a sacrifice* to God as a sweet-smelling fragrance” (i.e. God was pleased with it!); “Innocent”: 1 Pt 1:19: “You were redeemed ...by the precious blood [of Christ] as of a lamb *without defect or blemish*” (= ‘innocent’!), etc. etc.

His chapter as a whole shows unacquaintance with the meaning and use of the Hellenic terms in Hellenic literature, the Hebrew terms used in the old Testament as well as the way in which the Jewish translators of the Septuagint (= LXX) understood and rendered them into Hellenic. Not having studied the Hellenic and the Biblical evidence himself, he is unable to speak with first-hand knowledge; he contents himself with citing the views of a few scholars, who share his theological orientation and chooses the view of his own preference, without regard to what the texts say. My criticism concerns central aspects that relate to the chapter as a whole as well as matters of detail.

First, he begins by giving an incorrect picture of propitiation: “The death of Jesus is seen as an offer directed toward God and has as its purpose to appease his wrath”. This is a distortion of the position of those who accept the Biblical view of propitiation, for as we saw above, the death of Jesus achieves three things: (a) expiates sin, (b) propitiates the Father, and (c) reconciles men to God. Moreover, the immense love of God, who Himself takes the initiative to reach out to the sinner with divine salvation, has been greatly emphasized by those who accept the Biblical view of propitiation. On p. 176 he refers to the *hilaskomai* group of words, but from what he says it is obvious that he does not know what the words mean: he just follows Dodd’s interpretation of them and then adds Tom Wright’s eccentric opinion to strengthen the position – instead of studying the ancient texts themselves as well as the LXX evidence and the Hebrew terms they translate, in order to arrive at a scientifically reliable conclusion. He mentions some of Morris’ objections to Dodd, but from what he writes, it becomes obvious that he has failed to perceive the evidence of both the Old and the New Testament that Morris has presented in his meticulous study (p. 177), which completely shatters Dodd’s argument. Thus, oblivious to the evidence that has been marshalled against it,¹⁰³ he accepts Dodd’s position quite uncritically.

Second, in this relatively short chapter, the author uses the word ‘covenant’ (also in compounds which he constructs himself) no fewer than 35 times to interpret Paul’s teaching on the work of Christ on the cross, on God’s righteousness, etc. etc. in terms of Israel’s covenant. A

¹⁰³ E.g. by R.R. NICOLE, L. MORRIS, the best available commentary on *Romans* by C.E.B. CRANFIELD as well as other (citing in these works).

reader would naturally get the impression that the concept of the covenant must be a very frequently-occurring term in the Epistle to the Romans, since so much of Paul's theology is to be interpreted in the light of this concept. But when we look at the Epistle to the Romans, we are surprised to discover that Paul has used 'covenant' only twice: at 9:4 and 11:27, and in such contexts as have no bearing whatsoever on Paul's theology in general or on his discussion of the crucial text of Rm 3:21–26, in particular. The author has imported the concept of the covenant from an earlier chapter on "What was Wrong with Judaism?" in which he followed, uncritically again, – as I showed in my study on "The New Perspective" – Sanders and Dunn in the interpretation of Gal 2:15–16.

Third, another favorite word of the author – or rather a mistranslation of the Hellenic word *pístis* is his term 'faithful(ness)' (trofast(het)). The word *pístis* occurs 39 times in Romans and has regularly the meaning of 'faith'. Only on one occasion, Rm 3:3, is it possible that *pístis tou Theou* (=faith of God) could have the sense of 'faithfulness' – this, in view of some Jews' unbelief at the oracles of God that had been entrusted to them. Since "faith of God" here cannot have the same sense as "faith of God" in Mk 11:22, i.e. "faith in God", it is quite probable that the sense is faithfulness: God remains faithful. Our author, taking his cue from this singular instance, presumes to interpret also other texts, where *pístis* occurs, with the sense of faithful(ness), texts, which quite obviously cannot bear that meaning. One such example is Rm 3:22

But now apart from the law a righteousness of God has been revealed ... a righteousness of God *through faith in Jesus Christ*" where the italicized words are translated "through Jesus Christ's faithfulness/loyalty/fidelity".

He continues: "We can also state that it is God's righteous covenant-faithfulness that is the central *leitmotif* in Rm 1–3"! This is unbelievable! Commentators on Romans have regularly seen Rm 1:16–17 as the theme of the Epistle: God's righteousness which is attained by faith in Christ!¹⁰⁴ Where in Romans do we find this "God's

¹⁰⁴ E.g. W. SUNDAY and A.C. HEADLAM, *Romans* (old ICC), Edinburgh 1900, p. 22; K. BARTH, *The Epistle to the Romans*, O.U.P. rp. 1977, p. 35; C.K. BARRETT, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (BNTC), London rp. 1962, p. 27; J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT), Grand Rapids, 1965, p. 26; C.E.B. CRANFIELD, *Romans*, 2

righteous covenant-faithfulness”? Moreover, he connects his idiosyncratic translation ‘faithfu(ness)’ with the concept of covenant, which is totally absent from the context of Rm 3:21–26. It is imported from elsewhere. As a result, we get an interpretation that is wishful thinking rather than a reflection of Paul’s meaning.

The above three points indicate that Tellbe’s whole presentation and discussion of what Jesus accomplished through his death is built on mistaken assumptions, lack of proper research and a problematic exegesis. I shall now take up a few matters of detail, which, however, impinge on his entire thesis.

Commenting on some theologians’ view that God’s wrath is “an impersonal cause and effect reaction” (p. 173) he rightly says “it is, however, doubtful that we can place wrath outside of God” (p. 174), but only to explain it as “God is simply disappointed, dissatisfied, and saddened on account of man’s defiance”. This minimization of the gravity of sin is remarkable! We may wonder, Why do the Biblical authors speak of wrath, when all they mean is that God is “disappointed” and “saddened”? Surely, there were other words in both Hebrew and Hellenic to express these ideas.

On p. 176, without inquiring into the meaning of the *hilaskomai*-terms, he says some understand it as turning away God’s wrath, others as having nothing to do with propitiation, but with revealing God’s love! Here, he presents the position of those who accept propitiation and those who deny it as being equally warrantable or valid, without consulting the Biblical texts themselves. Moreover, he presents propitiation as opposed to God’s love! – as if those who accept propitiation reject God’s love! He has so polarized the concepts of propitiation and God’s love, that he presents the propitiation view as a denial of God’s love! The opposite is actually the case. The so-called “God’s love” view settles for a superficial, care-less, tolerant attitude of God toward sin, whereas the propitiation view sees the depth of the problem of sin and the greatness of God’s immense love in letting His own Son stoop to the lowest place possible (cf. Phil 2:5–11) in order to save man.

Vols. (new ICC), Vol. I, p. 87; J. FITZMEYER, *Romans* (Anchor Bible), London, 1993, p. 253; J.D.G. DUNN, *Romans* (WBC) Dallas TX, 1998, p. 37.

On pp. 176–8 the author presents Dodd’s and N.T. Wright’s similar views, and since he does not differentiate himself from them, we may take it that he shares their conclusions. Thus,

according to Wright God did not punish Jesus for Israel’s and the world’s sins but that God chose to have indulgence toward the earlier sins

and quotes *paresis* at the latter part of Rm 3:25. There is a confusion here in that the “earlier sins” that were overlooked (cf. *paresis*) on the ‘Day of atonement’ are here referred to Jesus’ death!

On pp. 187–9 he thinks that “God’s righteousness” and “God’s faithfulness” are more or less synonymous in the Old Testament. The scholarly position has been that sometimes “righteousness” and “salvation” (!) come close in meaning!¹⁰⁵ “Faithfulness to the covenant with Israel” (p. 178) is a concept of the author’s own making. “Righteousness” in the Epistle to the Romans is concerned with God’s being righteous in Himself (Rm 1:16; 3:5, 21, 22, 25, 26; 10:3), with the righteousness he imputes (Rm 4:5, 6, 9, 11 (2X), 22; 6:16) on those who believe in Christ (Rm 5:17, 21; 8:10; 9:30 (3X); 10:3, 4, 6, 10), and with righteousness as their fruit-bearing (Rm 6:13, 18, 19, 20, 14:17) as well as three times of Israel’s fruitless strivings (Rm 9:31; 10:3, 5). The concept of the ‘covenant’ does not at all figure in connection with God’s righteousness.

On p. 180, again failing to check the Hellenic original, mistranslates the aorist of the verb *apistō* ‘I do not believe’ and the substantive *apistia* ‘lack of faith’ as ‘unfaithful’ and ‘unfaithfulness’ and then contrasts them with God’s ‘faithfulness’. Worse than that, he claims that Paul “contrasts ‘unfaithful/unrighteousness’ with ‘faithfulness/righteousness’, where the concepts ‘faithfulness’ and ‘righteousness’ become almost interchangeable with each other”. The reader will try in vain to find these comparisons or contrasts in Paul’s text; they are taken out of the blue sky.

The author seeks to work out his favorite theme of God’s faithfulness to the covenant – which is nowhere to be found in Paul’s text. Thus, on p. 183 he says that

Jesus’ death is ultimately motivated by God’s covenant faithfulness. Accordingly, the passage’s last words are given the following meaning: ‘In our own time he wanted to show his righteousness [his righteous covenant

¹⁰⁵ See Chrys C. CARAGOUNIS, *Huvudpunkter i Paulus undervisning*, p. 54.

faithfulness]: that he is righteous [faithful to the covenant] and makes righteous [forgives and includes in his covenant fellowship] those who believe in Jesus’.

This is a hairraising exegesis. Within square brackets the author has included how he wants us to understand Paul’s words. As I have pointed out, there is nothing in Paul’s text to even remotely suggest that the salvific work of Christ had in view to make the gentile believers come into the fold of Judaism.¹⁰⁶ On the contrary, Paul strives everywhere to make the Jews come to believe in Christ, not to make the gentiles converts to Judaism and thus “make the new convert twice as much a child of hell as yourselves” – as Jesus expressed it (Mt 23:15) (*NIV* and *NRSV*).

Finally, on p. 187 rejecting the propitiatory work of Christ, he says that “Jesus’ death on the cross is God’s faithful initiative to prove his love and save the sinners” – where in the New Testament is this said?¹⁰⁷ Moreover, he gives as his opinion that the idea of propitiation is

an attempt to reconstruct an event within the trinity in order to explain what actually happened within the deity in an abstract legal transaction-thinking, where a wrathful God in exchange for something (Christ’s guiltless sacrifice) gives something else (forgiveness) ... the texts do not answer all our questions about what actually happened between Father and Son on the cross”.

It is certainly true that we can never know exactly what happened between the Father and Son, but the New Testament does not leave us altogether in the dark: cf. Heb 9:14: “Christ’s blood, who through the eternal Spirit presented himself [i.e. as a sacrifice!] without blemish to God”. Nor does propitiation have anything to do with Tellbe’s distorted description of it as “abstract legal transaction-thinking, where a wrathful God in exchange for something (Christ’s guiltless sacrifice) gives something else (forgiveness)”.

His last paragraph, in Abelardian spirit, concludes: “Jesus’ death on the cross has to do ... with revealing a God whose righteous faithfulness

¹⁰⁶ In Rm 11 Paul speaks of the root of the olive tree, but that is not Judaism; it is Abraham, the father of those who believe.

¹⁰⁷ Rm 5:8 “God demonstrates His love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” occurs in an entirely different setting than the setting Tellbe projects.

and holy love are infinite”. How differently Jesus describes his own death: “Shall I not drink the cup (! – the cup of suffering) which the *Father has given me?*” (Jn 18:11).

That Christ’s death was also propitiatory in character and thus affected God as well, has been abundantly shown above. But there is also supportive evidence elsewhere in Paul, see e.g. Eph 5:2 “just as Christ also loved us and offered himself on our behalf an offering and *a sacrifice to God as a well-smelling fragrance*”!

To conclude, it is deeply unfortunate and disturbing that Tellbe has chosen to ascribe to the propitiation view formulations which that view does not recognize, but which were intended to prejudice the reader against the Biblical teaching of propitiation. Regretably, Tellbe’s treatment of this issue is hardly what we would have expected of a scholar.

9. *Concluding Word*

The Biblical teaching that Christ by his death not only expiated the sin of man, but also propitiated the Father, averting His wrath, has been roundly denied by Dodd and his followers. Instead, they think in Abélardian style, that God sent His Son into the world to show His love in order to win men’s allegiance – a position that empties the suffering of Christ of its meaning.

In claiming this, Dodd paid less than adequate attention to the linguistic facts of the Hellenic language and literature, to the Hebrew terms used in the Old Testament and their translation in the LXX, and misstated the facts. When the data is researched carefully, it is seen that propitiation is both a logical and necessary category and that it is widely recognized in the Old Testament. Propitiation presupposes expiation. At the altar outside the temple, the high priest through offerings expiated the sins of the people, but inside the temple, when he sprinkled the sacrificial blood, on the ‘throne’ of God, he propitiated God, and received forgiveness for Israel for the sins of the previous year.

The study, in addition to treating all the important Hellenic and Hebrew terms that are germane to this issue, concentrates on the

meaning of *hilastērion* in Rm 3:25 and then on the exegesis of Rm 3:25–26.

The findings of this study show Dodd’s doctrine to be untenable. In this connection it is sad that this teaching has been propagated by M. Tellbe for a Swedish audience. Without properly researching the Biblical and extra-biblical material, he adopts Dodd’s views uncritically and propounds a teaching that is contrary to the teaching of the Old and New Testaments.

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