

## CHAPTER 13

### THE FATE OF TECHNICAL TERMINOLOGY IN DE TRANSLATIONS

#### A. Biblical Word Studies and Modern Semantics

In the previous chapter we have discussed the significance of the Septuagint as the version of the Old Testament most commonly used by the NT writers and the Christian community of the first centuries. Its influence is seen in over a thousand quotations and several thousand clear allusions; in the biblical style of some NT writers, and in the inherited theological vocabulary that they utilized. It is to the last of these that we shall now turn.

The Jewish writers of the NT did not have to invent a Greek theological vocabulary; such a vocabulary lay ready at hand in the Septuagint. A number of biblical commentators have pointed out how the Alexandrine translators of the LXX took over pagan religious terminology in the translation of the Hebrew Bible with the result that in Greek speaking Jewish circles these words acquired new significance from the Hebrew vocabulary that they represented or from the new context in which they were set (Dodd 1935; Morris 1955; Gooding 1962; Hill 1967; Shires 1974). The opening chapters of C.H. Dodd's The Bible and the Greeks contained many examples of the modification of Greek terms through their use in the LXX. Similarly the attention drawn by F.F. Bruce to the Greek word nomos and the change in connotation it has undergone to translate torah has been observed in the previous chapter. This connotation has been retained in NT writings (Bruce 1971:159-161 cf. Ullmann's demonstration of the

influence of Hebrew on Greek and the latter on Latin, 1962:165).

A similar phenomenon took place with regard to names and titles of divine beings, to words such as 'grace', 'truth', 'life', 'peace', 'salvation' and 'heaven' all of which have a long history in the OT, and to cultic terminology. It is commonly claimed that "almost every key theological word of the New Testament is derived from some Hebrew word that had a long history of use and development in the Old Testament" (McKenzie 1968:767 cf. Marshall 1977b:13,16; Goldsworthy 1979:6; Hasel 1978:138). Thus there has been much investigation of the background of the words of the NT and their roots in the OT. Kittel and Friedrich's eight volume Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (1962-1975) is the most famous. However, it must be acknowledged that such word studies have not always satisfied those with some training in descriptive linguistics.

In view of the claims being made in this chapter concerning the significance for biblical interpretation and translation, of the NT writers' usage of LXX terminology, some brief attention must be given first to modern developments in Semantics as they bear on our topic.

The relevance of semantics to biblical interpretation was demonstrated decisively in 1961 with the publication of James Barr's book, The Semantics of Biblical Language. Barr, who was at that time professor of Old Testament Literature at the University of Edinburgh, was concerned about unsound linguistic methods prevalent in biblical scholarship. His criticisms, supported by a wealth of examples taken from commentaries, word studies and theological works, focused on faulty lexicography and on the idea that the grammar of a language reflected a people's world view (in particular that differences of language structure between Greek and Hebrew

correlated with the differences in philosophical orientation or personality types found in those two cultures). Among the false assumptions he attacked was the view that the word rather than the sentence or speech-act constituted the basic unit of meaning to be investigated, and that questions about etymology somehow relate to the real or basic meaning of a word. He advocated the "semantic field" approach associated with the name of Trier. This approach, of which Barr made considerable use in a subsequent book, Biblical Words for Time (1962), involves the study not of one word but of a group, in which each element can be stated by delimitation against the other; the meaning is the choice of this word against that. Although the study of semantics can be approached from the side of philosophy as well as linguistics, James Barr and more recent writers who have sought to apply these principles to biblical interpretation (e.g. John Sawyer, 1972) have drawn their insights from linguistics, and particularly from the structural approach to language inspired by Ferdinand de Saussure (cf. Thistleton 1977).

In view of Barr's ruthless criticisms of many of the articles in Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, one might be tempted to doubt the value of word study altogether. But word study as such is not his target. His real complaint is against what he calls "illegitimate totality transfer" (Barr 1961:218). By this he means the reading into a word in a particular context of the sum total of the semantic values that it has in all its occurrences. Thus he takes the word ekklesia ("church") and considers its meaning on the basis of various usages in the NT. Preachers and writers expound the word as meaning "the Christian assembly", "the body of Christ", "the Bride of Christ", "the first instalment of the Kingdom" etc. There may be a sense in which this is the "meaning" of ekklesia but all these meanings drawn from different contexts cannot be

lumped together and assumed to be the meaning of ekklesia in each of its particular occurrences e.g. in Matthew 16:18. Barr successfully demonstrates that in a number of articles in Kittel's Dictionary it is erroneously assumed that words carry with them all the meanings which they may have in other sets of co-occurrences (cf. Nida 1972d:86).

Word studies, then, as such, are not to be dismissed as valueless. "There is usually in each word a hard core of meaning which is relatively stable and can only be modified by the context within certain limits" (Ullmann 1962:49).

R.H. Robins has wisely observed that words may be convenient units about which to state meanings "provided that it is borne in mind that words have meaning by virtue of their employment in sentences . . . and that the meaning of a sentence is not to be thought of as a sort of summation of the meanings of its component words taken individually" (Robins 1964:22). Much, too, inevitably depends on the type of words that we have in mind. Words normally have a number of different senses and it is the context which makes clear which sense is uppermost in a particular occurrence. Most words have a 'primary' sense that comes to the mind of native speakers when they hear it in isolation. It is the sense least conditioned by the context. What the translator has to keep in mind, however, is that the senses which a word has in one language seldom match the senses of the 'equivalent' word in another language. Even when the primary sense matches different words may have to be used to express the secondary senses. However, there are some words which seem to have only one sense (e.g. Messiah) or at least a relatively stable conceptual nucleus. Cultic terminology of the type we shall be discussing would be in this category.

As we turn to examine the selected cultic terminology, the lessons of modern linguistics must be kept in mind. Full justice must be done to the context in which the terms are used, both the immediate linguistic environment as well as the wider literary context - in this case the whole biblical corpus. Linguistics would further stress the importance of the non-verbal context that is the historical situation in which a term has been understood. In the case of the biblical literature one could imaginatively reconstruct a bewildering number of situational contexts of particular literary units. Thus one could read certain Psalms in the light of original Enthronement of Yahweh Festivals or in the context of the liturgical, theological and intellectual atmosphere of all the numerous religious communities that have read, sung, listened to or studied them up to the present time. One of the refreshing new trends in biblical research is to examine later historical contexts, and "corruptions" of the text with the same objectivity and enthusiasm as the "original" situational context in Israel's life. The biblical text is the result of a cumulative process possibly involving many layers of tradition. The semanticist (translator, commentator or lexicographer) can "freeze" the process and describe the meaning of the text in whichever period he chooses. The essential thing is that he makes it clear at the outset exactly what he is doing. It is one of the benefits of the structuralist approach to biblical interpretation that it takes seriously the final form of the biblical text as a valid linguistic environment on the basis of which semantic statements can be made (cf. Sawyer 1972:10-16). Accordingly we shall be commenting on the biblical text in its final form without delving into possible *Sitz im Leben* of particular passages unless these are explicitly described by the text itself.

Furthermore, in any semantic statements the priority of synchronic description must be observed. As James Barr has rightly said with reference to diachronic studies, "The main point is that the etymology of a word is not a statement about its meaning but about its history" (Barr 1961:109). Nor does one have to be a linguist to recognize that language, including biblical languages, has a history and that words change their meanings. This is particularly true of the Hebrew text of the OT which was written down over a number of centuries. Thus we read in 1 Samuel 9:9 that ro'eh (seer) is an archaic form subsequently replaced by nabi (prophet). Again in II Samuel 5:20 David can use baal in the place name Baal-perazim in its meaning of "lord", but by the time of the later prophet Hosea the term had become so associated with idolatry as to be a word banished from the redeemed Israel (Hos. 2:16,17). On the other hand, while recognizing fully the reality of change, one does not have to be such a relativist as to deny the possibility of continuity throughout history. This is particularly important when one considers the literary and poetic use of language where there <sup>i</sup>s usually a greater concentration on the language itself than in ordinary speech and writing. Poets or novelists hardly ever write spontaneously. Their use of language is normally accompanied by a certain amount of reflection on language (Siertsema 1969:8).

There are cases, too, where the etymology of a word is not just a fascinating distraction but an important part of semantic description. A word no longer in use in any living language; not attested in enough contexts to make synchronic description possible, and not occurring in a bilingual text, cannot be described in any other way (Sawyer 1972:90). Barr himself has attacked preachers who exploit

the etymology of a word for homiletic purposes. In particular, too much is read into dead metaphors. For instance the Greek verb splagchnizomai - to show compassion - is said to be particularly powerful because splagchna means "internal organs". But in the Gospels the Greek metaphor no longer had any more force than our English verb "to lose heart". Another favourite of preachers is the Greek word huperetes ("literally" the under-rower of a ship) which probably simply means "assistant" or "servant" when Paul says, "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ" (1 Cor. 4:1). Occasionally someone uses diachronic investigation in a way that leads to sheer anachronism, as when we are told that "witness" (Greek marturion) has the basic meaning of martyrdom, or worse still that dunamis in the NT properly means "dynamite"! (Thistleton 1977:81). I would suggest that Nida himself is guilty of imaginative etymologizing when he translates euangelion ("gospel") by "good news". This is a popular interpretation influenced by the etymology of our English word "gospel", but it is difficult to defend it on the basis of synchronic description within the context of the NT writings themselves. Yet the TEV (i.e. the "Good News Bible") translates euangelion by "good news" even in Revelation 14:6 where its context is "Fear God and give him glory for the hour of his judgement has come".

And yet these popular misuses of etymology rightly scorned by linguists should alert us to the possibility that such self-conscious use of language, and etymology in particular, may be found in ancient texts, too. In the case of biblical Hebrew, Sawyer has drawn attention to the possibility that a distinctive type of morphological motivation operates due to the structure of the language. He points to the relatively small number of morphological patterns; the remarkable stability of the transconsonantal root; the consonantal script, and

the frequency of folk etymologies, as reasons to allow for etymological motivation more developed than in the Indo-European languages (Sawyer 1972:50). The suggestion is worthy of further investigation. Certainly Paul, writing in Greek, exploits the Hebrew etymology of "jew" when he says in Romans 2:29, "He is a Jew who is one inwardly . . . His praise is not from men but from God."

With the above caveat we are prepared to observe the warnings of writers such as Barr. In the study of our chosen terminology any historical information must be subsidiary to a synchronic study of the contexts where the terms under discussion occur.

#### B. Concordance in Translation

DE translation theory emphasizes that contextual consistency has priority over verbal consistency or word-for-word concordance (TAPOT:14-22). Since in different languages the semantic areas of corresponding words are not identical, it is inevitable that the choice of the right word in the RL text to translate a word in the ST depends more on context than verbal consistency (ibid. 15). Nida's favourite example is the Greek word sarks which in the FC translations is consistently rendered "flesh" - a translation which he says distorts the meaning for it does not express the intended sense in each context (ibid. 16 cf. Nida 1977a:198). Therefore, following Nida, the TEV translated sarks by various terms e.g. "men" (II Cor. 7:5), "people of my own race" (Rom. 11:4), "men" (Acts 2:17), "human nature" (Rom. 8:3), "world/worldly" (II Cor. 10:3), "human point of view" (I Cor. 1:26).

As we have seen, the issue is an old one. The translators of the KJV stated quite openly their decision - "We have not tied ourselves to a uniformity of phrasing or to an identity of words". At the time of the preparation of the English Revised Version, the



problem was discussed at length and in a book entitled The Revision of the English Version of the New Testament (1873) Bishop Lightfoot accused the KJV translators of two groups of errors stemming from their espousal of the approach quoted above. In the first place he claimed that various renderings of the same word or words introduced artificial distinctions having no place in the original. In the second place he accused them of obliterating real distinctions by the same rendering of different words.

Some clarification of terminology is in order and the following treatment owes much to the helpful discussion of Concordance by Beekman and Callow (1974).

First of all two types of concordance must be distinguished: one relating to concordance within an original text; the other between an original text and its translation. The first refers to the repeated use of the same word or expression to refer to the same specific thing or concept. Beekman and Callow draw attention, however, to "pseudo-concordance" by which they mean the re-occurrence of the same word but with different senses. "Distribution of semantic components into word class or system will differ between languages, and the range of variability of semantic usages of a word in different contexts differs radically preventing a one-to-one matching of word-to-word in each of several contexts across two languages" (Pike 1977:389). Thus English assigns at least two meanings to the word "table" viz. "kind of furniture", and a different sense in "table of contents". It is conceivable that both usages occur in the same paragraph but we would not expect to find matching translations for both meanings. This is an example of polysemy (Ullmann 1962:164; Leech 1974:228), and hence pseudo-concordance.

If we then translate these two senses of "table" into Bahasa Indonesia

as meja and dafter respectively there has been no loss in meaning (unless the original text involved a pun). The "loss", if it may be called such, is in terms of the structure of the English lexicon, something that is language-specific and arbitrary. The translator should not attempt to reproduce such pseudo-concordance in the RL.

Where an original text exhibits deliberate re-occurrence of the same word with the same sense then this represents real concordance which the translator should seek to reproduce in the RL. Beekman and Callow cite I Corinthians 13, where Paul uses the Greek word agape, "love", no less than eight times to keep his topic in focus and reinforce his theme. This, then, is a linguistic feature of form that the translator should seek to carry over into the RL version. More important for our purpose (in view of the subsequent focus on the translation of cultic terminology) is their advocacy of concordant translation of the word "blood" in the Bible because of the deliberate allusion to OT sacrifices. In apparent criticism of the TEV they say, "To translate this symbol 'blood' simply as 'death' loses or at least obscures this designed concordance" (Beekman and Callow 1974:156).

Sometimes there are, however, problems in maintaining real concordance. If, for instance, the metaphor "blood" was felt to be misleading in the RL (but this is not the case in English) then the problem could be overcome by using the word "blood" and "to die" in a clause. Inevitably difficulties in the lexical structure of languages pose problems which result in either a reduction <sup>or</sup> of gain in the internal concordance of the translation as compared to that of the ST. Beekman and Callow cite Ephesians 4:32 as causing problems in one of the Otomi languages of Mexico. The same feature exists in Bahasa Indonesia. Paul says, "Forgive one another as God for Christ's sake

has forgiven you." The Greek original (cf. English) is able to use the same word to forgive in both cases (i.e. charizomai) but in this Otomi language it is unthinkable that the same word could be used of human forgiving and divine forgiving. Similarly earlier Indonesian versions of the Bible were careful to distinguish between memaafkan (human forgiving) and mengampuni (divine forgiving). However, of four versions in current use, two translate charizomai by mengampuni in both cases, thus retaining the concordance of the ST. It is not clear whether the "natural" usage is being changed by "foreign" influence. Whatever the background it provides another warning to the translator not to slavishly bind himself to what is "natural". Languages are not immutable systems and the translation of the Bible can itself be an important influence in language change. A completely concordant translation is impossible. But the translator should seek to reproduce the concordance of the ST unless it is intolerable in the RL.

C. A Case Study: The Translation of Hilaskesthai (Propitiation) Words in the New Testament

Nida reports that when the TEV was published some readers said that they were shocked not to find the word 'propitiation' (Nida 1977b:73). This is one of the traditional salvation words found in the King James Version, and S.R. Driver claimed that propitiation was one of the three main categories used in the New Testament to interpret the death of Christ (HDB, IV, 132). It is true, as has been pointed out, that generally such theological understandings of the NT writers are borne by sentences rather than by individual words (Barr 1961:249). Thus, to assess Driver's claim with regard to propitiation one would not restrict the investigation to the occurrence of certain terms but rather note the larger discourse units which refer, for instance, to

the wrath of God. Nevertheless we must assert again the particular importance of technical terms which, however strange and difficult to the modern reader, function as signposts pointing to certain religious presuppositions and to a peculiar historical and social background without which the thinking of the NT writers cannot be understood. Since Nida himself has drawn attention to, and defended, the disappearance of "propitiation" (or any comparable term) from the DE translation which he commends, it will provide a suitable case study, on the basis of which we hope some general conclusions can be reached about the translation of OT technical terms in the NT.

The terminology under focus is the hilaskesthai word group comprising the verb (ex)hilaskomai and the nouns hilasmos and hilasterion. There are 160 occurrences of these words in the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) usually in connection with the sacrificial cultus. There are only six occurrences in the NT (two of each) of which four refer directly to the death of Christ.

Recent English translations prior to the TEV had reflected some uncertainty as to whether this terminology was best translated by "propitiation" or "expiation". According to Moulton and Milligan (1930: sub hilaskomai) the hilaskomai word group in Hellenistic Greek, as in Classical, refers to placating wrath. They interpret hilaskomai with accusative of the person as 'render propitious to oneself', and go on to note 'a similar use of the compound exilaskomai which extends to the LXX.' Some biblical scholars, however, notably C.H. Dodd, have argued that the notion of propitiation or appeasement is hardly found in biblical Greek but rather gives way to an impersonal 'expiation' or 'atonement' (Dodd 1935:82ff). There is no suggestion of a difference in the action performed. Rather, a difference in intention is signified. Propitiation refers to the placating of an

angry party - be it divine or human. Expiation, on the other hand, has in view the removal of an offence or compensation for it.

A comparison of pre-1935 and post-1935 Bible translations and commentaries testifies to the tremendous influence of Dodd's thesis. Prior to 1935 "propitiation" is universally accepted; subsequently "expiation" becomes the norm (Young 1976:69). Dodd was to become in fact chairman of the NEB NT translation project.

Dodd's conclusions, however, were later challenged by Leon Morris who argued that in a majority of Biblical usages, when the context is consulted, it is plain that "the averting of anger seems to represent a stubborn substratum of meaning from which all other usages can be naturally explained." (Morris 1955:155). In his assessment of the Biblical data James Barr is reluctant to allow that the sacrificial system involved any element of "appeasement of an angry, offended or arbitrary deity" but concedes that in many contexts "the anger of God falls on Israel when the sin is not expiated so that expiation has a certain apotropaic aspect; it alone turns away the anger of God . . . it is therefore difficult to carry out the clear distinction of expiation and propitiation." (HDB rev. ed. 810). A painstaking study by David Hill, Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings (1967), has given cautious support to Morris' criticism of Dodd. In a recent Festschrift to Morris, Howard Marshall has claimed that "his discussion of the meaning of the hilaskomai word group, in which he demonstrated that it refers to propitiation rather than expiation, has been confirmed by the work of R. Nicole and D. Hill (Marshall 1974:153).

The TEV sidesteps altogether the expiation-propitiation debate by using a phrase such as "the means by which men's sins are forgiven." Nida answers the critics as follows:

What these persons did not sense was their own misunderstanding of the meaning of "propitiation" which really refers to the process of "making someone favorably inclined toward another." The English term "propitiation" might be described as a high-brow way of talking about arm-twisting, but there is no need for arm-twisting to get God on man's side. It was God who was in Christ reconciling the world to himself; Christ did not have to reconcile God to the world. The Greek noun *hilasmos* and the related verb *hilaskomai* never occur in the New Testament with God as the object, and in 1 John 2:2 it is not the propitiation of sin but the expiation of sin which is spoken of. For many readers, however, the term "expiation" would be even more difficult than "propitiation". In fact, both "expiation" and "propitiation", like "justification", "sanctification", and "predestination", are not much more than anglicised Latin. The words exist in dictionaries, but they are only very rarely heard in speech. Hence, if even the phrase "expiation of sins" is to be understood, it is much better rendered in 1 John 2:2 as "And Christ himself is the means by which our sins are forgiven." With this wording the vital message of this important verse becomes crystal clear. (1977b:73-74).

Had Nida been content to argue that in a common language version or in view of the target audience there is no room for such rare and difficult words, one could perhaps accept his position. But that is not his argument at all. Apart from his strange antipathy to English vocabulary with Latin origins, he finds the whole idea of propitiation repugnant (and not on convincing linguistic grounds) but rather than opt for the equally difficult "expiation" he advocates a simplified paraphrase that no longer has any contact with the sacrificial cultus whose categories are being used by the NT writers. That "the vital message now becomes crystal clear" may be true. But to what extent is it the same message?

It is appropriate at this point to review the linguistic evidence. The hilaskesthai word group has a long history of usage in the LXX, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible so often quoted by the New Testament writers, and the version with which the first readers of the NT letters would have been most familiar (Jellicoe 1968). These terms are chiefly used as equivalents of the Pi'el conjugation of the Hebrew verb kipper and its derivatives. The debate among scholars

as to whether kipper originally meant "cover completely" or "wipe out" is not relevant for our purpose. Its cultic use denotes the restoration of a relationship between God and man which has been broken by sin, normally through the offering of a sacrifice. Thus God is said to have taken the initiative in providing the means of atonement, e.g. Lev. 17:11 "I have given it [the sacrificial blood] to you upon the altar to make atonement [Heb. le-kappār, LXX exilaskesthai] for your souls."

That the LXX translators seemed to have regarded exilaskomai and kipper as virtual equivalents is a useful guide to the meaning of the Greek term. However, the Greek text is worthy of investigation in its own right. This is apparent if we look at those verses where the Greek translators used an hilaskesthai form even though no kipper word is found in the underlying Hebrew text. Dodd assumed that propitiation was not intended in these cases. However, closer examination indicates that the translators were governed by ideas expressed in the context rather than merely finding equivalents for particular Hebrew words. Thus in 2 Kings 24:4 the Hebrew clause reads welo - 'abāh adonai le-seloach - The Lord was unwilling to forgive. In the LXX we would expect to find the root seloach translated by a Greek verb such as aphienai (forgive) or katharizein (cleanse). Instead the LXX reads: ouk ēthelēsen Kyrios hilasthenai, i.e. The Lord refused to be placated. It appears that the Septuagint translator was influenced by the context which concerns God's judgement on Judah for the evil perpetrated by King Manasseh. The same construction is found in Daniel 9:19 and Lamentations 3:43 where again the context of seeking to avoid Divine wrath leads to the use of hilasthenai. Again in Exodus 32:14 where the Hebrew says that as a result of Moses' intercession "the Lord repented of the evil that

he intended to do to his people," the LXX reads "kai hilasthai" translating the root n-ch-m.

Even clearer is the use of exilaskesthai to translate chillah (mollify) in Zechariah 7:2; 8:22; and Malachi 1:9. Dodd acknowledges that these are "unmistakeable examples of the ordinary classical and Hellenistic sense of exilaskesthai = propitiate" (Dodd: 355) but maintains that because the reference is to non-Israelites they can be allowed little significance. Dodd's argument would carry some weight if the narrative described pagan worship. Instead it is about Gentiles who join the Jewish pilgrims going to Jerusalem.

Another interesting example is found in Ps. 106:30, the one occasion where the LXX uses exilaskesthai to render pillēl, a verb which means pray or intercede and which is normally translated proseuchesthai. In this verse the psalmist recalls the incident related in Num. 25 when Israel "attached themselves to the Baal of Peor and ate sacrifice offered to the dead they provoked the Lord to anger with their doings and a plague broke out among them. Then Phineas (the priest) stood up and interposed and the plague was stayed." (Ps. 106:28-30). As noted above pillēl means no more than intercede but the Septuagint translator, apparently reflecting on the context, writes down "Phineas stood up and placated (the Lord)." The LXX choice of exilesthai was no doubt influenced not only by the general theme of averting God's wrath (Num. 25:3-5 records God's command to Moses to "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"), but also by the memory of the end of that narrative where the Lord gave to Phineas "the covenant of a perpetual priesthood because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the people of



Israel" (Num. 25:13 RSV). The Hebrew verb translated "made atonement" is kipper and the LXX translation is exilasato used without an object just as in Ps. 106:30 (cf. also Eccclus. 45:23).

We have seen then in these unexpected appearances of hilaskesthai or exilaskesthai in the LXX (viz. Zech. 7:2; 8:22; Mal. 1:9; Ps. 106:30; Eccclus. 45:23; 2 Ki. 24:4; Ex. 32:14 and 1 Sam. 6:3) that the verb seems to be used by the translators with the propitiatory meaning that it bears in non-biblical Greek.

In 83 out of 105 occurrences in the LXX 'exilaskesthai' translates the Hebrew root kipper usually in a cultic context. The instances in the non-cultic contexts can be rendered "propitiate". Some examples are: Prov. 16:14 "The wrath of a king is as a messenger of death, but a wise man will appease it" (LXX exilasetai). In Gen. 32:20 Jacob thinks that his present will appease Esau's wrath and the LXX renders the words literally: "exilasomai to prosōpon autou en tois dōnois." Again 2 Sam. 21:1-14 describes King David's attempt to get rid of a famine which had been caused by his predecessor's ill-treatment of the Gibeonites. David asks them, "What shall I do for you? With what shall I make atonement?" (kipper, LXX exilasomai). It is agreed that the seven sons of Saul be hanged. The passage includes the ideas of propitiating anger and making compensation. In these non-cultic contexts, kipper (and the hilaskomai form used in the LXX to translate it) regularly bears the meaning to avert punishment by the payment of a kopher (ransom) which may be money or which may be a life.

However, as most occurrences of exilaskesthai are found as the translation of kipper in cultic contexts where the worshipper expresses his penitence ritually by animal sacrifice, Biblical scholars agree that this usage is the most significant for interpreting

the terminology of the New Testament. The ritual of the Day of

Atonement (Yom Kippurim) described in Leviticus ch. 16 is typical:

"Then the priest shall kill the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood within the veil, and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it upon the mercy seat (hilasterion) and before the mercy seat; thus he shall make atonement (exilasetai) for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions." (Lev. 16:15-16).

Similar cultic usages can be found in Ex. 30:10, 15, 16; Lev.

1:4; 4:20,26,31,35; 6:6,10,12,16,18; 6:7,30,37; 8:15,34; 9:7; 10:17; 12:7,8; 14:18,19,20,21,29,31,53; 15:15,30; 16:6,10,11,16, 17,18,20,24,27,30,32,33,34; 17:11; 19:22; 23:28; Num. 5:8; 6:11; 8:12,19,21; 15:25,28; 16:46,47; 25:13; 28:22,30; 29:5,11; 31:50; 35:33; Deut. 21:8; 1 Sam. 3:14; 6:3; 1 Chron. 6:49; 2 Chron. 29:24; 30:19; Neh. 10:33; Ps. 106:30; Ezek. 43:20,22,26; 45:15,17,18,20; Dan. 9:24; Zech. 7:2. In some contexts the notion of propitiation is particularly strong, e.g. Num. 16:44-46:

"And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron 'Depart from the midst of this congregation, and I will consume them at once'; and they fell upon their faces. And Moses said to Aaron, 'Take a censer and put on it fire from the altar, and put incense on it, and carry it away quickly into the camp, and make atonement for them [Heb. Kapper; Greek exilosai]; for wrath is gone forth from the presence of the Lord; it has begun to destroy the people."

However, often, especially in Leviticus and Ezekiel, it is not obvious whether ideas of propitiation or expiation are foremost. The verb has become a standard technical term which is perhaps best translated "make atonement". Dodd is right to underline the difference between the biblical use of hilaskomai words and the normal Greek association with a capricious and vindictive deity whose arbitrary punishments can only be avoided by appropriate bribes. Both OT and NT alike represent God himself as taking the initiative in providing the means for restoring the broken relationship between Himself and His

people, cf. Lev. 17:11, "I have given it [the sacrificial blood] to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls", and Rom. 3:25, "Christ, whom God set forth to be a propitiation (hilasterion) through faith, by his blood." But clearly propitiatory connotations have not disappeared. If that had been the intention of the LXX translators or the NT writers after them, it is incredible that they would choose terms which in normal everyday usage were saturated with propitiatory associations. However distasteful to the modern mind, one cannot escape the constant references to the wrath of God in both Old and New Testaments. But the Biblical context always makes clear that this is no arbitrary passion of a capricious deity but the stern reaction of a holy God to man's disobedience and evil.

Three other members of the hilaskomai group must be looked at before we turn to the NT texts. Firstly, hilaskomai itself (as distinct from the far more common compound verb discussed above) occurs only 11 times in the LXX. The underlying Hebrew is kppr 3 times, slh 6 times, and nhm once. There is no corresponding Hebrew verb for the occurrence at Esther 13:17. Generally these Hebrew verbs convey meanings such as 'forgive', but as we have already seen (e.g. Ex. 32:14), the LXX translators felt free to use an hilaskomai word if the context warranted it. Thus, in 6 out of these 11 occurrences, there is explicit mention of wrath (e.g. Ex. 32:14; Lam. 3:42; Dan. 9:19). 2 Ki. 5:18 refers to the incident where Naaman, the Syrian, asks pardon for bowing down in the pagan temple of Rimmon, i.e. the most heinous of sins in a Jewish context - idolatry.

It has been argued that in the case of Ps. 64:4, where "sins" is in the accusative case, the translation should read "expiate our sins". This may be correct. But it is interesting that a number of manuscripts read the dative case. This shows that if the original were an accusa-

tive it was regarded as so unusual that some scribes felt constrained to modify it to a dative. Certainly both hilaskomai and exilaskomai are generally used with an emphasis on relations between persons, a fact which accords better with a meaning such as propitiate than expiate. The most common construction occurring some sixty times is peri with the genitive of the person (i.e. to make propitiation concerning a person).

The nouns hilasmos and exilasmos are used interchangeably some 16 times in the LXX. Forgiveness is the meaning in Daniel 9:8 and Psalm 129:4. But it is the cultic usage which prevails in such expressions as "day of atonement", "house of atonement", "blood of atonement" (Nu. 5:8; Lev. 23:27,28; 1 Chron. 20:28; 28:11; Ezek. 7:25; 43:23; 45:19). As well as translating kpr it is used to translate the Hebrew word for sin offering (e.g. in Amos 8:14; Ezek. 44:27; 45:19). In some contexts the propitiatory overtones are very strong (e.g. Dan. 9:8; 2 Mac. 3:33).

Finally, the noun hilasterion occurs 27 times in the LXX. On 21 occasions it translates the Hebrew kapporeth or mercy seat. This golden slab in the Holy of Holies was held to be the special place of God's presence and it was sprinkled with blood on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). Hilasterion also occurs 5 times in Ezekiel's vision of the postexilic temple (Ezek. 43) where it denotes a ledge on the sacrificial altar on which blood was to be painted. There is only one non-cultic use of hilasterion and that is in the apocryphal 4 Maccabees, a book written about A.D.40 (see Hill 1967:43), a few years before the NT letters were written. Referring to the martyrdom of the seven brothers, the verse reads:

They having as it were become a ransom (antipsychon) for the nation's sin; and through the blood of these righteous men and

the propitiation of their death (tou hilasteriou thanatou), the divine providence delivered Israel which had hitherto suffered evil.

The commentary of 2 Maccabees on the same incident (i.e. 7:33-38) confirms the propitiatory interpretation of the death of the brothers:

I, like my brothers, give up body and soul for our fathers' laws, calling on God to show favour to our nation soon . . . and to let the Almighty's wrath, justly fallen on the whole of our nation, end in me and in my brothers.

These passages, by the way, were not treated by Dodd because he regarded LXX books for which there was no available Hebrew original as unsuitable for his comparative method. His aim was to demonstrate how the Hebrew original forced Greek words into a new mould. However, once again, Dodd's methodology can be criticized. The whole range of LXX usage is relevant to the investigation, particularly as Dodd also is arguing that the usage of the NT authors was determined by the usage of the Septuagint.

Because Dodd's investigation has proved the point of departure for modern study of the hilaskesthai terminology (Young 1976:67), it would be as well to review his methodology before summarizing the conclusions of this discussion of LXX usage. Dodd sought to establish the meaning of exilaskomai and cognates by a threefold method of approach (Dodd 1935:82ff). Firstly, he looked at other Greek terms which translate the Hebrew kipper. Secondly, he examined Hebrew verbs other than kipper that are occasionally rendered by exilaskomai. Finally, he looked at exilaskomai as the normal LXX translation of kipper. The first approach revealed that kipper is sometimes translated by such variants as hagiazō, katharizō, apaleipho, athooō, verbs meaning "sanctify", "purify" (persons or ritual objects), or "to cancel", "purge away", "forgive" sins. He then draws the

illegitimate conclusion that the LXX translators must have regarded the more common hilaskesthai class as conveying similar ideas.

Dodd's second line of investigation is threatened by four texts which we have discussed above, namely: Zech. 7:2; 8:22; Mal. 1:9; and Ps. 106:30. But he concludes that with the exception of these four texts the hilaskomai group, when translating Hebrew roots other than kipper, means "to cleanse from sins" or "to expiate" with a human subject, and "to be gracious", "to have mercy" or "to forgive" with a divine subject. We have suggested above, however, that the LXX translators' unexpected use of hilaskesthai (rather than e.g. katharizo or aphieni) does not necessarily indicate a modification of its meaning but rather shows they were more influenced by the context with its references to God's wrath than by merely substituting word for word equivalents. Dodd's third approach concludes that where exilaskomai translates kipper as a religious term, it does not have the sense of propitiating the Deity but of performing an act whereby guilt or defilement is removed. He gives little weight to the non-cultic occurrences of kipper as he regarded them as being of no consequence for the cultic texts. He has come under fire for this from Hill, who maintains the former are important for discovering the basic meaning of the word (Hill 1967:31). However, Hill, who seems to claim more than Morris did for the significance of non-cultic usage, is on dangerous ground. After all, neither the language of the Hebrew Bible nor the Septuagint is entirely homogeneous. In defining the meaning of words or phrases one must allow for the possibility of variation according to the style and register being used. By "register" we mean the variety of language appropriate to a particular social situation (cf. Catford 1965:85; Sawyer 1972:17f). Hence it is theoretically quite possible that exilaskomai conveys strong ideas of appeasement

in non-cultic contexts which recede or disappear in its cultic occurrences. From his three lines of enquiry, Dodd concludes:

Hellenistic Judaism, as represented by the LXX, does not regard the cultus as a means of pacifying the displeasure of the Deity, but as a means of delivering man from sin, and it looks in the last resort to God himself to perform that deliverance, thus evolving a meaning of hilaskesthai strange to non-Biblical Greek (Dodd 1935:89).

He then applies to the NT occurrences the findings of his LXX enquiry, arguing that the traditional rendering "propitiation" is illegitimate in the NT.

The above discussion has sought to draw attention to some weaknesses in Dodd's methodology, which vitiate his study. His arguments, drawn from the translation variants (his first two lines of approach) are not legitimate (he is unable to show that they are synonyms). His lexicographical method regularly ignores the context, and so neglects the element of wrath so frequently present (cf. Morris: 129-136).

#### 'Hilaskesthai' Words in the New Testament and the Implications for Bible Translation

We can now turn to the six occurrences of hilaskesthai words in the NT and their translation. The first, Heb. 2:17, is explicitly cultic. It is said that Jesus had to become truly human so that he might become "a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God eis to hilaskesthai for the sins of the people". Noting that the verb is followed by "sins" in the accusative case, Bruce comments that:

the renderings of RSV ("to make expiation for") and NEB ("to expiate") might be justified here because the direct object of the verb is sins (hamartias). But if sins require to be expiated, it is because they are committed against someone who ought to be propitiated. (Bruce 1964:41).

Morris, however, defends the traditional rendering "to make propitiation with regard to the sins of the people", treating it as

an accusative of respect. He points out that (i) although there is no reference to wrath, yet the mention of Jesus as a "merciful high priest" presumes the classical usage, (ii) the phrase "things pertaining to God" (ta pros ton theon) focuses on the Godward aspect of the atonement, (iii) the few occurrences of "sin" in the accusative form after the verb seem to imply propitiation, (iv) the variant reading (tais hamartiais) found in some early manuscripts arose in circles where the peculiarity of the accusative after hilaskomai was felt.

Rather than press for an interpretation solely in terms of propitiation, perhaps we could be satisfied with the translation of the NIV "that he might make atonement for the sins of the people", cf. the Jerusalem Bible's "able to atone for human sins". Such translations make clear that the work of Christ is being explained in terms of OT sacrificial categories, something which is not at all obvious from the TEV's "so that the people's sins would be forgiven."

This verb hilaskomai is only found again in the words of the penitent publican in Luke 18:13 ho theos hilastheti moi, toi, hamantolo, usually translated "God be merciful to me a sinner." The ASV margin has "Be thou propitiated" but although it could be argued that God's holy reaction to sin is implied, there is no reference to divine wrath and "be propitiated" or "be propitious" seems a bit forced. Accordingly, seven of our eight translations represent the words simply as a plea for God's mercy. The TEV substitutes "pity" for "mercy" (viz. "God have pity on me a sinner"). This is not an improvement as it takes us more into the realm of feelings and emotion rather than attitude.

Next we come to the noun hilasterion in Hebrews 9:5 and Romans 3:25. The first is a clearcut reference to the "mercy seat" which one



meets so often in the LXX. The writer to the Hebrews is describing the furnishings and sacrificial arrangements in the sanctuary under the Old Covenant before going on to demonstrate the superiority of the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ. Above the ark of the covenant, he reminds his readers, were "the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat (to hilasterion); of which things we cannot now speak in detail." Again Bruce's standard Commentary on the epistle clarifies the background:

The lid of the ark was a golden slab called the mercy-seat or place of propitiation (Gk. hilasterion, so LXX for Heb. Kapporeth. That Heb. Kapporeth means more than "lid" or "cover" and is akin in sense to the Piel conjugation kipper, "make atonement", is suggested by the emphasis which is placed upon it, in its own right, in the sacrificial ritual for the Day of Atonement, Lev. 16:2, 13ff.). The blood bath of the bullock which was offered to make atonement for the high priest and his family, and of the goat which was killed as a sin-offering for the whole nation, was sprinkled on the mercy-seat and in front of it, while the God of Israel undertook to appear in the cloud upon the mercy-seat (Lev. 16:2 cf. verses 14f.). The "cherubim of glory" were two gold figures of composite creatures which over-shadowed the mercy-seat (Ex. 25:18-22; 37:7-9) and served to support the invisible presence of Israel's God, who accordingly is repeatedly described as the One "who sits above the cherubim" (1 Sam. 4:4 etc.). It was because of this function that they were called "cherubim of glory"; the glory is shekhinah, the radiant presence of God dwelling in the midst of His people. (Bruce 1964:189-190).

There has never been any doubt then what is denoted by to hilasterion in Hebrews 9:5. The KJV, RV and RSV and Phillips rendered it "mercy seat". The NEB's "place of expiation" and NIV's "place of atonement" have the virtue of retaining the concordance of the source text. We would recommend "place of propitiation" or "place of atonement" in line with the above exposition of LXX usage.

Again the TEV, alone of all our translations, fails to preserve the reference to the OT ritual of sacrifice with its generalized rendering "the place where sins were forgiven." Incidentally, the use of the past tense "were forgiven" seems to imply that at the

time the Epistle was penned, this ritual was no longer observed - a view not justified by the internal evidence (and most commentators have assumed the Epistle to the Hebrews was written before the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in A.D. 70). There is, of course, no verb in the original, but the substitution is typical. In the following paragraph, namely Hebrews 9:6-9, the writer describes the priestly ritual as if it is still going on and the TEV faithfully reproduces the present tenses of the Greek verbs without apparently sensing any inconsistency with the "were forgiven" above: "The priests go into the outer Tent every day to perform their duties, but only the High Priest goes into the Inner Tent, and he does so only once a year. He takes with him blood which he offers to God . . ."

The use of hilasterion in Romans 3:25 falls in what is generally agreed to be one of the key sections of Paul's Epistle (Rom. 3:21-26). The immediate context states "For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward hilasterion by his blood, to be received by faith."

Dodd's view, so influential for the RSV and NEB, was as follows:

Here it is unnecessary for our present purpose to decide whether hilasterion is an adjective in the accusative singular masculine or a neuter substantive. In any case the meaning conveyed (in accordance with LXX usage, which is constantly determinative for Paul) is that of expiation, not propitiation (Dodd 1955:95).

That the usage of hilasterion in biblical Greek is the best guide to Paul's meaning is not in dispute. But the preceding discussion has shown that ideas of propitiation are unmistakeably present in LXX usage. Furthermore when we study the context of Romans 3:25 we find it is dominated by themes of judgement and wrath. For "when we

consider the general argument of the Epistle to this point, we find that the opening chapters have a single dominating purpose, namely, to demonstrate that all men lie under the condemnation and wrath of God" (Hill 1967:39). The argument begins (1:18) with the announcement "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth." The following verses emphasize that this is not some impersonal, automatic moral law at work, as Dodd seeks to argue in his Commentary on Romans (Dodd 1959:49), but the personal reaction of a Holy God. Thus "God gave them up to the lusts of their hearts" (1:24) "God gave them up to vile passions" (1:26), "God gave them up to a reprobate mind" (1:28). Having described God's wrath on the pagan world in chapter one, Paul then rounds on the censorious Jews in chapter two and shows that they are likewise under God's wrath. He clinches his case with a bracket of OT quotations in chapter three so "that every mouth might be sealed and all the world brought to trial before God." (3:19-20).

It is this background of universal culpability and condemnation, then, that precedes Paul's announcement of a new factor whereby, quite independently of law, a righteousness of God is revealed, a righteousness leading to the sinner's justification through Christ "whom God set forth hilasterion, through faith, by his blood - hon proetheto ho theos hilasterion dia pisteos en to autou haimati). Commentators agree that hilasterion goes with "by (or in) his blood" and not with "through faith", despite the word order (so Dodd 1959:79); Morris: 179; Cranfield: 210). In other words, Christ became hilasterion by means of the shedding of his blood. The context of Rom. 3:25, then, is so full of the idea of God's wrath that it is not unnatural to expect some expression which indicates its cancellation. This was

certainly the interpretation of the older commentaries. Thus Sanday and Headlam's classic International Critical Commentary notes:

"It is impossible to get rid from this passage of the double idea (1) of a sacrifice; (2) of a sacrifice which is propitiatory . . . And further, when we ask, Who is propitiated? the answer can only be 'God'. Nor is it possible to separate this propitiation from the Death of the Son. Quite apart from this passage, it is not difficult to prove that these two ideas of sacrifice and propitiation lie at the root of the teaching not only of St. Paul but of the New Testament generally." (Sanday and Headlam 1902:91).

Much new linguistic, textual, historical and archeological evidence has become available for Biblical studies since the I.C.C. series of commentaries was conceived almost a century ago. It is gratifying therefore that the publishers have commissioned new volumes to incorporate these advances and that the first to appear is a new 2 volume commentary on Romans. The author, C.E.B. Cranfield, has a lengthy treatment of hilasterion in which he reviews recent scholarly discussion. As the word is used in twenty one out of its twenty seven LXX occurrences to translate the kapporeth or mercy seat (cf. Heb. 9:5 above) he considers the possibility that Paul is using it here in that sense, too, portraying Christ as the anti-type of the OT mercy seat. He recalls that this interpretation has the support of a long exegetical tradition and finds it attractive. However, he concedes that Morris has undermined this interpretation by pointing out that wherever in the LXX hilasterion means mercy seat, it is used with the definite article. Nor is there anything in the context which can be said to indicate unambiguously that the mercy seat is referred to. In evaluating Dodd's study, Cranfield supports Morris' criticism that Dodd neglected the contexts of the hilaskesthai terminology, and he agrees that the averting of wrath is basic to the OT usage as it is to extra-biblical Greek. With regard to the inter-

pretation of hilasterion in Rom. 3:25, he reduces the options to

- four:
- (i) "propitiatory" or "propitiating"
  - (ii) "a propitiator"
  - (iii) "a propitiation"
  - (iv) a propitiatory sacrifice.

In view of the additional phrase en tō autou haimati ("in his blood") he finally recommends the fourth. Paul is saying "that God purposed Christ as a propitiatory victim" (Cranfield 1975:217).

At this point it might be appropriate to comment on the translation of haima. Despite Nida's acknowledgement that "blood" should be retained in those NT passages "where there is a clear reference to blood as a symbolic element in the sacrifice of Jesus" (Nida 1977b:75), the TEV translates en tō autou haimati in Rom. 3:25 with "by his death". Since hilasterion is again translated by the general phrase "the means by which people's sins are forgiven", the reader is deprived completely of the two clues which tell him that the death of Jesus is being explained by Paul in terms of OT sacrificial categories. In fact, the TEV's systematic removal of references to Jesus' blood is difficult to understand. Nida defends it by pointing to a number of passages where it is retained (e.g. John 6:53-56; Heb. 9:14; 10:29; 13:12; 1 John 1:7 and the reference to the Lord's Supper, viz. Matt. 26:28; Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:25,27) and by adding that

It would be a serious mistake, however, to assume that wherever the Greek term haima occurs, it should always be translated "blood", since in many instances it has quite a different meaning. In Matthew 27:24-25, Pilate washes his hands and says to the crowd, "I am innocent of the haima of this man." Quite clearly Pilate is referring to Jesus' forthcoming execution, and when the crowd shouts back, "May his haima be upon us and our children," the reference is to their demand for Jesus' death. For this reason the Good News Bible renders Pilate's statement as 'I am not responsible for the death of this man' and the crowd's response as 'Let the punishment for his death fall on us and on our children.' (TAPOT:76).

It is not easy to follow Nida's reasoning here. Admittedly there is no allusion to sacrificial ritual. But "blood", in English, as well as Greek, may be used metaphorically as well as literally. To claim that haima does not mean "blood" in an expression like "I am innocent of the haima of this man" is to take an extraordinarily wooden attitude to language. One wonders why Pilate bothered to take water and symbolically wash his hands before the crowd.

The TEV's renderings are a needless impoverishment. "Blood" remains in the English language as a particularly vivid metonymy for death.

Finally, we turn to the noun hilasmos which in the NT occurs only in the First Epistle of John at 2:2 and 4:10. As the context provides little new evidence, we assume the term bears its normal meaning, "propitiation". Nothing in the context or the eight LXX occurrences gives us reason to interpret it otherwise.

The first passage, 1 Jn. 2:2, says "If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is hilasmos for our sins. The second is 1 Jn. 4:10 "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His son to be hilasmos for our sins." There is no explicit mention of God's wrath in the three brief Johannine Epistles, but in his Gospel, John does state that "the wrath of God abides" on the disobedient unbeliever (3:36 cf. 5:29) so the concept is clearly not foreign to the "apostle of love" as he is known. Moreover, the fact that Jesus Christ the righteous is the Advocate in heaven could be seen to imply divine hostility. John Stott, commenting on these verses, succinctly captures the uniqueness of biblical propitiation - "It is an appeasement of the wrath of God by the love of God through the gift of God" (Stott:88).

Once again we must underline the inadequacy of the TEV translation of hilasmos as "the means by which our sins are forgiven" though the NEB's "remedy for the defilement of our sins" is no better.) Whether we opt finally for the traditional "propitiation" (or even "expiation") or the more Anglo-Saxon "atonement" in translating the hilaskesthai word group is not so important. What is crucial is that the translation preserves this technical usage and so makes clear to the modern reader that the death of Christ is being explained in terms of OT sacrificial ritual.

#### D. Conclusion

The Jewish writers of the NT utilized terminology which lay at hand in the Greek Septuagint. In many cases this terminology had acquired a slightly different and more restricted sense than in secular usage, either because of its use as translation equivalents for Hebrew religious vocabulary or because of the new context in which it was embedded. Biblical commentators are unanimous that this terminology is highly significant because it anchors the gospel of Jesus firmly in the religious traditions and eschatological hope of Israel. However, Nida's DE theory, and its exemplification in the TEV, takes no account of the significance of this technical terminology, replacing it with simplified paraphrases which, though more intelligible to the modern reader, deprive him of access to the "universe of discourse" of the NT writers.

This study focused on a particular group of cultic words associated with the sacrificial system which was not only central in the religious history of Israel but was still part of the contemporary social experience of the NT writers (J.A.T. Robinson 1976). The study was carried out along quite conventional lines. No attempt was made to experiment with more recent methods such as the semantic field

approach (cf. Trier, Barr, Sawyer) or the meaning-relations approach of structural semantics (J. Lyons). However, the investigation has sought to avoid the kind of pitfalls pointed out by Barr and has given full value to context and synchronic description. Certainly in the field of biblical studies semanticists have a distinct advantage over their colleagues in other areas of linguistic research in so far as they have a closed literary corpus to deal with.

The particular terminology selected was the hilaskesthoi, a group which in both Classical and Koine Greek refers to the placating or appeasing of the wrath of a person - usually associated with a vengeful and capricious god. Much consideration has been given to the view of C.H. Dodd that in the LXX usage, influenced by the underlying Hebrew text, practically no vestige of the propitiatory sense remains and that rather, these terms come to refer to an impersonal expiation or cancellation of sin - at least in cultic contexts. This, according to Dodd, was the usage inherited by the NT writers. His views have been very influential in English Bible translation since 1935.

Our own study has confirmed that the underlying Hebrew text generally provides a good guide to the interpretation of the Greek version. However, not all the LXX translators seem to have regarded their task as one of mechanically inserting equivalents. Ideas expressed in the context rather than the presence of a particular Hebrew term often influenced their translation into Greek. Dodd's neglect of this factor has been rightly criticized by Morris (1955) and Hill (1967). Dodd was, however, correct to recognize that the language of the LXX, like its Hebrew Vorlage, is not entirely homogeneous and he was right to allow for the possibility that



usage of hilaskesthai words in the cultic religious register might not be the same as that in the conventional language (where he acknowledged that propitiatory ideas prevailed).

In the LXX there are some 160 occurrences of hilaskesthai words normally as translation equivalents for the kipper word group in the Hebrew Bible. Occasionally hilaskesthai words are used unexpectedly to translate other Hebrew verbs meaning "forgive" or "cleanse". But closer inspection of the context reveals references to Divine wrath and its avoidance which apparently influenced the translator to opt for a propitiation word. Most occurrences of hilaskesthai words are in the context of the sacrificial cult. Here the words acquire technical sense "to make atonement" (i.e. between God and man by the offering of an appropriate gift). However, there is no evidence that propitiatory connotations have disappeared. In urging the use of "expiation" rather than "propitiation", Dodd (like Nida) was influenced more by theodicy than linguistic evidence. That is not to say that there are no modifications of the associations of these terms compared with their extra-biblical sense. The context of the Scriptures made it clear that the God of Israel is perfectly righteous and free from arbitrariness and caprice in His actions. Moreover, He Himself graciously provides what is necessary for the averting of His righteous wrath from man. It is this cultic usage that is inherited by the NT writers.

When we turn to the six occurrences of hilaskesthai words in the NT (Heb. 2:17; Lk. 18:13; Heb. 9:5; Rom. 3:25; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10) it is clear that the technical usage of the LXX is determinative in each case except one (Lk. 18:13). In other words the ST confronts the translator with a concatenation of ideas which however foreign

or repugnant to the modern mind are vital to an understanding of the writer's message - sacrifice, blood, propitiation, cleansing, forgiveness - ideas rooted directly in the sacrificial system of the OT law.

The propitiation-expiation debate, then, is of minor significance compared with the importance of recognizing that this is technical language drawn from the sacrificial cultus. The use of these hilaskesthai words in the Bible reflects a real concordance in the ST. This has in fact been recognized and reproduced in standard translations. The TEV, however, by dropping the cultic terminology in favour of a general paraphrase more intelligible to the modern reader, obliterates the concordance of the ST and deprives him of the clues that he needs to understand the NT writer.