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The Meaning and Translation of *Hilastērion* in Romans 3:25

The Professor of New Testament in the University of Zululand here presents a detailed study of one word in a problem text with important implications for its translation.

The word *hilastērion* in Rom. 3:25 remains a *crux* for the interpreter. A quick survey of a number of Bible translations may illustrate the point.

- Gnadenstuhl: Luther
- Sühnopfer: Würtembergische Bibelanstalt (=WB) (1965)
- versoening; verzoening: Afrikaans (1953); Staten Vertaling
- als zoenmiddel: Nederlandsch Bybelgenootschap (NBG)
- as offer wat . . . versoening bewerk: Nuwe Afrikaanse Bybel (NAB) (1981)
- a propitiatory covering: Rotherham
- a propitiatory sacrifice: Conybeare
- a propitiation: AV (1611), RV (1881), NASB (1960), Cunningham (1935), Weymouth (1937)
- the means of propitiation: Phillips (1949), Moffatt (1913)
- a sacrifice of atonement: NIV (1973)
- an offering of atonement: Montgomery (1924)
- to take the punishment for our sins and to end all God's anger against us: The Living Bible (TLB)
- an expiation: RSV (NT: 1946)
- a means of expiation: NEB (NT: 1961)
- the means by which his people's sins are forgiven: TEV (1976)
- through whose sacrificial death sin can be forgiven: Barclay
- so as to win reconciliation: The Jerusalem Bible (JB)
- a means of reconciliation: The Twentieth Century NT (TCNT).

A comparison of these translations shows that the word *hilastērion* confronts us with at least three basic problems.

(a). The grammatical form of the word. Should it be taken as an adjective (NAB, Rotherham, WB, etc.), or a substantive (AV, etc., RSV, NEB, TEV, etc.)?

(b). The theological overtones included. Does it include the idea of propitiation (Rotherham, Conybeare, AV, etc. Phillips, etc.) or expiation (RSV, NEB etc.), or both? and

(c). closely connected with (a) and (b), the translation of the term.

The second problem (b) has become a battle ground over the last thirty odd years. Dodd (1931) contends that the idea of sacrifice as a means of propitiating the deity's wrath is indeed the sense of the verb *hilaskesthai* in pagan Greek literature, but that this idea is not Biblical. He maintains that the basic Biblical idea of *hilaskesthai* is that of expiation, that sin is covered, and not of propitiation. Dodd's position has been widely challenged since the early 1950s.[1] There can be little doubt that he overstated his case. We need not go into the question again. Suffice it to note that the case for finding the idea of propitiation in the context of Rom. 3:25 is indeed a strong one.

Our discussion will focus mainly on the first problem (a). We will consider the adjectival use of the word *hilastērion* in Rom. 3:25, and more particularly, the suggestion that it is a neuter accusative adjective with *thûma,* sacrifice, understood. Then we will consider three major alternatives involving the substantival use of the word. Next we will make a few comments on the translation of the word in Rom. 3:25; and finally, we will draw a few conclusions.

1. *Hilastērion* as an Adjective

The word *hilastērion* belongs to a class of Greek adjectives whose ending (*-ērios*) signifies 'what serves to'. Deissmann maintains that the adjective *hilastērion,* conveying the idea of 'what bears relation/reference to' *hilaskesthai* carries semantically both the sense of 'what has the reference to/serves as propitiation', 'versöhnend', 'propitiatorius', 'placatorius', and 'what has reference to/serves as *expiation* (of sin), 'sühnend', 'expiatorius' (1903:193).

The adjectival use of the word occurs beyond doubt in non-Biblical literature. In the few known non-Biblical instances it occurs as qualifying, for instance, *thánatos, mnēma,* and *thusia.*[2] In the LXX it occurs once, with *epíthema* (Ex. 25:16 (17)). However, concerning the adjectival use we must stress,

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[1] Dodd's method and/or conclusions have been challenged, for instance, by Garnet 1974:131; Hill 1967:23ff.; Morris 1951:227ff.; 1955a:155; Nicole 1955:117ff.; Young 1976:67ff.; Young 1983:169ff., however, supports Dodd's preference for the idea of expiation.

[2] See for discussion and references, Deissmann 1903:195ff. There *is* only one instance where *thusia* is used with *hilastērion*; none with *thûma;* cf. Deissmann 1903:193ff.; Fitzer 1966:167.

(a). that the number of instances that can be cited are but few and, with one exception, all extra-Biblical; and

(b). that there seems to be no clear instance where the substantive *thûma* is understood (Morris 1955:33; Sanday and Headlam 1971:87f.; cf. Deissmann 1903:198).

In Rom. 3:25 the adjective form is linguistically possible[3] but advocates of this interpretation do not agree as to its meaning. Some take it in the more general sense of 'able to make expiation for sin' (Barclay 1973:68), and so on. Others regard it as a masculine accusative adjective agreeing with the relative *hon*: '(Jesus Christ) whom God set forth as *making propitiation*' (Denney 1970:611; Sanday & Headlam 1971:88); or as *'den Gott öffentlich hingestellt hat als Versöhnenden* oder *Sühnenden*' (Deissmann 1903:209).[4] Still others take it as a neuter accusative adjective with some substantive as *thûma* understood: 'Whom God set forth' either as 'a propitiatory *offering/sacrifice*' (Alford 1958:343; Hodge 1965:92f; Lightfoot 1904:271; Murray 1967:117), or as 'an expiatory *offering/sacrifice*' (Lohse 1963:152; Michel 1966:107f; Richardson 1958:225).

We leave aside the question whether the adjective includes overtones of propitiation or of expiation. Of some importance is the fact that this rendering where *thûma* is supplied, is preferred not only by various commentators, etc.[5] but also by some modern Bible translations (cf. NAB, NIV, WB). Charles Hodge defends it on three grounds:

(a). The etymology of the word. He argues that since *hilastērion* goes back to *hilaskesthai,* to appease, to conciliate, the adjective is applied to anything designed to propitiate. But the question is not whether the word can be used linguistically with *thûma,* but whether we may assume in the absence of supportive evidence from antiquity[6] that it was indeed commonly used in this sense in secular or Christian usage. Also, the so-called etymology of the word does not necessitate taking the word as an *adjective* with *thûma* supplied.

(b). The 'use of analogous terms in reference to the sacrificial services under the old dispensation.' Thus, for instance, *sōtērion* in Ex. 20:24, for which we find *thusia sōtēriou* in Ex. 24:5. It is claimed that the usage of this and other analogous terms as *charistērion, telēsterion,* etc. entitles us to supply *thûma* in Rom.

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[3] Cf. Deissmann 1903:194, 'recht wohl möglich.'

[4] So also *Itala,* Vulgate, and others.

[5] See text above and n. 4.

[6] Cf. Garvie 1922:10, 'no evidence of the use of the word in the sense of propitiatory victim has been produced.'

3:25 and to translate it with 'propitiary *sacrifice*.' G. F. Moore, although recognizing that this translation is not entirely certain regards it as 'highly probable' (1903:4229). We have two objections:

(i). Although there is no *linguistic* objection against this translation the absence of clear evidence from antiquity that *thûma* was used in this way speaks forcibly against accepting this possibility too lightly.

(ii). The appeal to the use of analogous terms can at most suggest the possibility of a parallel use of *hilastērios*. It cannot be adduced as proof of it. There remains a stubborn element of uncertainty as regards the supplying of *thûma* in Rom. 3:25.

(c). It is claimed that the whole context favours the adjectival use with *thûma* understood, especially the references to 'the blood of this sacrifice' and to God's purpose to show how man's justification by grace can be reconciled with God's righteousness (Hodge 1965:93). But granted that the idea of sacrifice is present, it does not follow that the idea (of sacrifice) is conspicuously in focus in each passage where there is a reference to Christ's blood. In Rom. 3:25f. the emphasis is not on the element of sacrifice.[7] Nor does the context 'favour' the adjectival use of the word. Nor does it require that the substantive *thûma* be supplied. The sacrificial overtones of the context are not dependent on the adjectival form of the word *hilastērion*. On the contrary, it can be argued that the context actually opposes any emphasis on the idea of sacrifice. The word *protithesthai* is not in the LXX a technical term for making a sacrifice;[8] other terms such as *prospherein* etc. are used (Stuhlmacher 1975:325). *Protithesthai* in the sense of 'set forth publicly' is, however, a cultic technical term for the public placing of the showbread on the table in the tent of meeting (Ex. 29:23; 40:23; Lv. 24:8; cf. 2 Macc. 1:8, 15) (Balz & Schneider 1982:440; Stuhlmacher 1975:328; Wilckens 1978:192). This idea fits in beautifully into our present context as we shall see below.

We conclude that although the theology of a phrase like 'a propitiatory or expiatory or atoning sacrifice' may be correct, the arguments adduced by Hodge in favour of this option are by no means convincing.

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[7] Stuhlmacher 1975:328, rightly maintains that 'In Röm 3, 25f. bleibt das Moment des Opfers Jesu unbetont, und betont wird, dass Gott selbst in seiner heilschaffenden Gerechtigkeit in der Hingabe des Lebens Jesu Sühne geschaffen habe.'

[8] Says Cremer 1895:306, 'Προτίθεσθαι could hardly be used of a propitiatory offering'; cf. Deissmann 1909:130, 'It can hardly be said of a sacrifice that God προέθετο it.'

(d). Some interpreters attempt to find support for this interpretation in 4 Macc. 17:21f. The martyr's death of the seven brothers is described as an *antipsuchon* for the sin of the nation of Israel and as a *hilastērion*: (22) 'and through the blood (*dia toû haimatos*) of those righteous men and their propitiatory death (*toû hilastēriou thanatou autōn*)[9] the divine providence delivered (*diesōsen*) Israel . . .' There exists a 'remarkable community of thought' (Hill 1967:42; Morris 1955:42f.) between Rom. 3:21ff. and 4 Macc. 17:21f., and some scholars have argued that the word *hilastērion* carries a similar meaning in the two passages.[10]

However, this line of interpretation holds little promise of general agreement. The differences between the two passages are quite marked.

(i). In 4 Macc. 17:21f. the substitutionary death of the brothers is explicitly stated whereas in Rom. 3:23ff. the language is 'allusive and ambiguous' (Whiteley 1974:146);

(ii). The fact that it is God himself who effects the propitiation/expiation in Paul, can only mean that Rom. 3:25 must be interpreted in the light of the Levitical sacrificial ritual (Wilckens 1978:193). This is not offset by the objection that it is harsh to think of God both as the One who set forth the *hilastērion* and unto whom the sacrifice had to be offered (cf. Büchsel 1938; 321, 18ff.; Kertelge 1971:58; Schrage 1969:81);

(iii). In 4 Macc. 17:22 *hilastērion* is used as an attributive adjective with *thanatou* but in Rom. 3:25 it is substantivized as we shall point out below, and consequently carries a different meaning. For Paul, Jesus, in his death, was decisively distinguished from the Maccabean martyrs.[11]

E. Lohse offers a variation on this approach. With an appeal to 4 Macc. 17:21f. he thinks it possible that Paul could have made some redactional changes to a pre-Pauline Jewish-Christian formula quoted in Rom. 3:25, 26a: the original formula could have read *hilastērion thûma,* but Paul, adding *dia pisteōs* after *hilastērion,* could have dropped *thûma* in the process (1963:152). This means that the adjective supposedly used in a pre-Pauline

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[9] The reading *toû hilastēriou toû thanatou* of Aleph is possibly secondary. In either case, however, *hilastērios* is used as an adjective.

[10] Hill 1967:46ff.; Käsemann 1974:91; Lohse 1963:152; Morris 1955:42f.; Cranfield 1975:217f., 'The possibility that his [Paul's] thinking about the death of Christ was influenced by these ideas cannot be ruled out.' So already Rashdall 1920:123, who considers it as 'highly probable' that 4 Macc. was the source of Paul's usage.

[11] Cranfield 1975:218; Stuhlmacher 1975:325, who points out that 'zu beachten bleibt in jeden Fall dass von einem Sühnopfer der Märtyrer gar nicht gesprochen wird'; Schrage 1969:81; Wengst 1972:89 Anm. 10.

liturgical formula was changed into a substantive *hilastērion* only through Paul's redaction of the tradition. But this position is untenable. Stuhlmacher has cogently refuted the permissibility of 4 Macc. 17 as source for interpreting Paul's meaning in Rom. 3:25, and also the proposed translation viz. *'expiatory sacrifice'* (1975:325–8). It is more probable that the ideas expressed in the two passages are simply similar.[12] The Maccabean passage illustrates that the idea of ascribing atoning efficacy to the death of the righteous was no innovation in Judaism (Barrett 1975:78).

2. *Hilastērion* as a Substantive

The case for taking *hilastērion* in Rom. 3:25 as an adjective is not strong. Deissmann is probably correct that a Greek-speaking Christian would have thought primarily of the more common substantival use of the term and that also Paul intended it in this sense (1930:209). Taken as a noun there are two possibilities.

First, the word might be taken as a *substantivized masculine adjective, ho hilastērios* (Lat. *propitiator*). So, for instance, by some Latin versions of the Vulgate 'propitiatorem', by Wyclif 'an helpere', Cranmer 'the obtainer of mercy', Erasmus 'reconciler', and others.[13] But this interpretation has little to commend it. It is inconsistent with the context (Hodge 1965:93). Furthermore, as Zahn has already pointed out,[14] the bearer of a function, an office, etc. can only be described by (a participle or) an adjective as such when the adjective (or participle) form is fully substantivized through constant usage (1925:186 Anm. 62). But such a usage cannot be established from antiquity for any masculine adjective on *-erios* (1925:186). Concerning *hilastērion* it has to be proved at least that in addition to the neuter form of the word the masculine form was also substantivized. But this has not been possible (1925:186). In addition, if the Apostle wished to use a masculine substantive here, then the noun *hilastēs* was available. It is more probable that *hilastērion* is a neuter substantive in Rom. 3:25 (Hill 1967:41; Morris 1955:34).

Secondly, the word may be taken as a *neuter accusative substantive.* Since the neuter of adjectives in *-ios*, especially those

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[12] Morris 1955:43, 'It is not necessary to assume dependence: it is simply that the ideas being expressed in the two passages are similar'; Whiteley 1974:146, 'the event recorded in 4 Macc. is not parallel to, but a type of the work of Christ.

[13] Quoted in Sanday & Headlam 1971:81f.; Zahn 1925: 186 Anm. 62, and other references there.

[14] So also Käsemann 1973:91, and others.

in *-erios,* are very frequently substantivized[15] this is the most natural option.[16]

Some interpreters maintain that *hilastērion* in Rom. 3:25 is a neuter substantive, that it must be taken in close conjunction with the phrase *en tō autoû haimati,* and that it carries some general sense as 'instrument/means of propitiation'[17] 'means of atonement' (Howard 1970:227; Taylor 1938:297), 'a means of dealing with sin' (Barrett 1975:77; cf. Barclay), 'a means of expiation' (Dodd 1959:78f.; NEB), 'Sühnemittel', 'Sühne'.[18] But taking the word in this sense is without example in antiquity (Beet 1898:369); it is also 'zu allgemein und daher zu blass'.[19] In addition the word *protithesthai* when used in the meaning of 'to set forth publicly' requires a specific, concrete object. Translations as those mentioned above are not definite enough (cf. Bleibtreu 1883:556).

Others take the neuter accusative *hilastērion* as a *nomen loci,* applying typologically to Christ certain properties of the *kappōret* (Lv. 16).

The word *hilastērion* occurs some twenty-seven times in the LXX and twice in the NT. In some twenty of its LXX occurrences as well as in Heb. 9:5 it refers to the *kappōret,* the golden lid on top of the ark of the testimony. In the LXX and in Hellenistic Judaism as represented by Philo of Alexandria *hilastērion* became a technical term for the *kappōret* (Büchsel 1938:320, 21ff.; Lyonnet & Sabourin 1970:159ff.). On occasion of its earliest occurrence (in Ex. 25:16 (17)) *kappōret* is translated by *hilastērion epithema.* This is a notoriously difficult rendering. Assuming that *epithema* is neither a gloss (*contra* Manson 1945:3), nor 'a double rendering of the word (*kappōret*)' (*contra* Lightfoot 1904:272), nor a mere expansion of the simple *hilastērion* (*contra* Cremer 1962:475), there can be no doubt that the term is an adjective qualifying *epithema* in Ex. 25:16 (17) (Büchsel

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[15] Deissmann 1903:194, 'Sehr häufig substantiviert und bürgerten sich als usuelle Substantiva ein.'

[16] Deissmann 1903:209, 'Die Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass Paulus das substantivierte Neutrum gebraucht hat, ergebt sich lediglich aus der Statistik des Wortes . . .'

[17] Beet 1898:369; also Bible translations, for instance, Phillips, Moffatt, etc.

[18] Käsemann 1950:99; Knoch 1976:221; Kümmel 1952:159f. 'äusserst wahrscheinlich'; Kuss 1963 I:157; Lietzmann 1971:49; Stuhlmacher 1965:88, and others.

[19] Lohse 1963:152; Goppelt 1976:422, 'eine sehr blasse Aussage.' A typical instance of the vagueness involved here, is Ziesler's contention that *hilastērion* 'is not highly charged here, but simply a traditional word which Paul does not exploit in any technical way but rather quotes to indicate that Christ's death and resurrection are the means of dealing with sin by bringing about death to it' (1982:358).

1938:320). Deissmann cogently argues that *epithema, cover,* is the proper translation of the word *kappōret,* but that the LXX translator elucidated *kappōret,* used here in a technical sense, by a 'theological adjunct which is not incorrect in substance; and that while *epithema* then, is a rendering of *kappōret* the word *hilastērion epithema* is a translation of *kappōret* the religious concept' (1909:125). In the subsequent LXX passages where *to hilastērion* translates the word *kappōret,*[20] it is used as a neuter accusative substantive. Deissmann contends that in these instances the word signifies something like 'propitiatory article' (1909:126). But this may be questioned. It seems more probable that in all these cases *to hilastērion* is a *nomen loci* denoting, as Manson says, 'the locality at which acts or events covered by the verb *hilaskesthai* take place' (1945:1).

Two functions in particular are connected with the *kappōret:*

(i). It is envisaged as the place in the tent of meeting above which Yahweh dwells (1 Sa. 4:4; 2 Sa. 6:2; Ps. 80:1(2)) and from which he reveals himself (Ex. 25:32; Lv. 16:2; Nu. 7:89). 'From above' the *kappōret* Yahweh speaks to Moses (Nu. 7:89);

(ii). It is also the place in the tent of meeting with the most profound cultic significance (*contra* Fitzer 1966:19). Once a year, on the great Day of Atonement, the high priest had to sprinkle the blood on the *kappōret* and in front of it, in order to make atonement for his own sins (Lv. 16:14) and for that of Israel (v. 15).

Used as a technical term for the *kappōret* the word *hilastērion* would, of course, carry both these ideas (included in the *kappōret*) to believers steeped in the Old Testament.

The typological interpretation of *hilastērion* in Rom. 3:25 as a *nomen loci,* applying to Christ the properties of the *kappōret,* has a long history in the exegesis. As Barth remarks: 'The analogy with Jesus is especially appropriate' (1977:105). Some considerations seem to affirm the typological interpretation.[21]

(i). This is the most natural interpretation. To any Jewish or gentile Christian who was well acquainted with the LXX, the word *hilastērion* in the context of Rom. 1–3 would spontaneously call to mind the *kappōret* of LV. 16. For this is by far the commonest meaning of the word in the LXX.

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[20] Elsewhere in the LXX where *hilastērion* signifies the *kappōret,* it is always written *to hilastērion,* that is, with the definite article, but without *epithema.*

[21] Cf. Barrett 1957:78, 'There is much to be said for the traditional view that Paul represented Christ as the "true mercy-seat" '; Bruce 1969:106, 'On the whole it seems best to take *hilastērion* here as a substantive, alluding to the mercy-seat . . .'

(ii). The context supports it solidly: it fits in admirably into Paul's description of the exceeding sinfulness of all the world before God; it suits the emphatic *autoû* in the phrase *en tō autoû haimati;*[22] the mention of the *doxa theoû* (v. 23); the reference to the (sacrificial) blood of Christ as the means of atonement; the term *hilastērion* itself; and the resultant forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7), justification (Rom. 3:24; 5:9), reconciliation with God (5:10, 11), and peace with God (5:1). This remarkable correspondence with motifs which are also connected with the Day of Atonement, indicates, as Richardson says, 'that Paul is putting forward the view that Calvary is the Christian mercy-seat.' (1958:225; also Manson 1945:6ff.; Nygren 1965:118ff.; Wilckens 1978:191f.).

(iii). An impressive history of interpretation supports this interpretation. Rabbinic sources[23] as well as the unanimous interpretation of the Greek Fathers and many protestant exegetes, including Luther and Calvin, support it.[24]

If this interpretation is correct, then the Apostle is saying that Christ on the cross, i.e. 'in his (own) blood', has become to the world all that the *kappōret* was for Israel. 'What was symbolically figured forth on the Day of Atonement has been fulfilled in Christ' (Hunter 1955:47). Christ on the Cross is the place where God meets the sinner and shows his mercy to the world.

Some five objections raised against this interpretation are worthy of attention.

(i). It is claimed that v. 25 is part of a pre-Pauline liturgical formula from tradition, and that since nothing in the context indicates that Christ should be compared to the *kappōret,* the Apostle should have given some clear indication to his gentile-Christian readers if he had in mind the *kappōret.*

(ii). Contrary to LXX usage the definite article is lacking with *hilastērion* in Rom. 3:25. Consequently, the reference cannot be to the *kappōret.*

(iii). The word *proëtheto* in the meaning 'to set forth publicly' does not suit the conception of the *kappōret* which was hidden from all eyes in the Holy of Holies.

(iv). The allusion to the *kappōret,* it is claimed, makes an impossibly harsh typology since Christ, then, is made simultaneously the place of sacrifice and the sacrifice itself;

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[22] That is, 'in His (own) blood.' Cf. Hunter 1955:46; Schmidt 1963:68; *contra* Davies 1948:241f. 'doubtful'; Hill 1967:41 'questionable.'

[23] Strack & Billerbeck 1926:165f. points out that the rabbis interpreted the *kappōret* as the place of God's presence and revelation, the place of forgiveness of sins, and the holiest object in the Holy of Holies.

[24] Cf. Hunter 1955:47, 'In Christian literature outside the NT ἱλαστήριον always means a "place" '.

(v). The main argument against the typological interpretation, for some (Käsemann 1973:91; Kümmel 1952:265; Taylor 1960:39) is that the predominantly Gentile-Christian community in Rome would scarcely have understood so 'ambiguous' an allusion.

How conclusive are these arguments?

(i). The view that nothing in vv. 24–26 indicates that Paul is thinking of the *kappōret* is 'surely mistaken' (Davies 1948:239). We noticed that all the crucial motifs that occur in the present context are also found in connection with the Day of Atonement. Says Davies: 'The pre-occupation of Paul in Rom. 1–3 with the exceeding sinfulness of men would naturally suggest to him, even if it would not to us, the thought of that greatest day of all days when this very fact would loom large for any Jew, especially a Rabbi—the Day of Atonement.'[25] We have here a well-known aspect of Paul's way of referring to the OT.[26] Further the hypothetical nature of the view that v. 25 is part of a pre-Pauline liturgical formula whether derived from the *Urgemeinde* (Bultmann; Käsemann) or Hellenistic Jewish Christianity (Lohse), should be recognized. If Paul is the actual author of the passage, which many regard as more probable, much of Lohse's argument (1963:152) falls away.

(ii). The absence of the definite article does not preclude the concrete connotation of the word *hilastērion* as a *nomen loci* (Swain 1963:137). More than that, taking the word as a *nomen loci* would do away with the necessity for the article (Davies 1948:240), especially since it is not the Apostle's aim to identify Christ with the *kappōret* in a strict sense. Christ crucified was the 'place' *par excellence* where God's mercy was supremely manifested. Yet the Apostle does not envisage identity between Christ and the *kappōret.* Christ was *hilastērion* 'in his own blood.' Further, the absence of the article can be adequately accounted for also on stylistic grounds, and even on the assumption that the verse goes back to a traditional formula.[27]

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[25] Davies 1962:239; see also Lührmann 1970:438, and Anm. 6 there.

[26] Cf. Dodd 1952:31, who points out that there are many instances where Paul's intention to quote is evident although no formula of quotation is used. 'Such passages', he maintains, 'show all degrees of resemblance to the text of the Old Testament—verbal identity with the manuscript text of the LXX, alternative translation of the Hebrew original, paraphrase, or a similarity just sufficient to suggest an allusion.'

[27] Rehkopf 1976:252; Roloff 1980:456; cf. Stuhlmacher 1975:322f, 'Da im neutestamentlichen Formelgut, im Definitionestil und beim Prädikatsnomen der Artikel normalerweise nicht gesetzt wird . . . ist das Fehlen des Artikels vor ἱλαστήριον in Röm. 3, 25 nicht weiter verwunderlich, denn das Wort steht hier als Prädikatsnomen'; Wilckens 1987:71, 'erklärt sich aus Formelstil.' Young 1983:170 overstates the case when he declares: 'The lack of the article

(iii). To aor. mid. *proëtheto* is undoubtedly used here in the sense 'to set forth publicly', 'öffentlich aufstellen' (Bauer 1963: 1432). For various reasons the alternative translation, 'to propose to oneself' 'to purpose', is unacceptable. It is stylistically and grammatically difficult.[28] Again, since the context is concerned with the fact of the *apolutrōsis* in Christ's death and not with the divine intention this meaning is also theologically unsuitable (Hodge 1965:92; Maurer 1969:167, 5f.; Ridderbos 1959:85). Then again, the immediate context is so full of terms denoting 'publicity' (vv. 21, 25, 26) (Sanday & Headlam 1971:87) that the same meaning is to be preferred here (Althaus 1970:34; Murray 1967:117 n. 21; Sanday & Headlam 1971:87; Schlatter 1965:145).

In favour of the former meaning is that the word *protithesthai* is not in the LXX a technical term for offering a victim. But we noticed earlier that in the cultic context *protithesthai* is used for the setting forth in public the showbread (Ex. 29:23; 40:23; Lv. 24:7, 8; 2 Macc. 1:8, 15). Thus, although it would not be expected to connect *proëtheto* in Rom. 3:25 with the concept of a sacrifice, the word fits in well into the idea that Christ was set forth publicly as the (new) place of expiation/propitiation and of meeting with God (cf. Stuhlmacher 1975:328).

The Apostle's meaning may include two crucial notions: first, that a contrast is envisaged between the old *kappōret* and the new one, which is Christ-on-the-cross. In Christ the *kappōret* 'is no longer kept in the sacred seclusion of the most holy: it is brought out into the midst of . . . the world and set up before the eyes of hostile, contemptuous, or indifferent crowds' (Manson 1945:5; also Black 1973:69f.; Bruce 1969:107; Jager s.a.:41; Schmidt 1963:68). Certain broad antitheses between the old and new *hilastērion* are envisaged (Manson 1945:4ff.; Black 1973:69f.; Bruce 1969:107; Jager s.a.:41).

The old hilastērion	*The new hilastērion*
1. Is hidden in the most Holy	1. Is displayed publicly
2. Its benefits depend on ritual	2. . . . depend on faith
3. Its expiation is effective through animal blood.	3. . . . through Christ's own (*autoû*, emphatic) blood.

Secondly *proëtheto* may indicate the public character of the proclamation of the Gospel. In this sense the word is then taken

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certainly indicates that Paul did not intend to identify Jesus with a long lost cult object . . .'

[28] Maurer 1969:167, 3ff.; Michel 1966:197 Anm. 1; Ridderbos 1959:85 'omdat men bÿ deze dubbele accus. een infin. zou verwachten'; Sanday & Headlam 1971:87.

by many as semantically equivalent to *proëgraphē* in Gal. 3:1, 'before whose eyes Jesus Christ was portrayed (= placarded publicly, set forth in public proclamation so that all may read) on the Cross' (Eichholz 1972:192; Moulton & Milligan 1963:538; Robertson 1931 IV:347; Schrenk 1933:771, 17ff.). The two meanings need not be exclusive of each other, but rather complementary (cf. Althaus 1970:34).

(iv). Wilckens is correct that in this objection 'spricht jedoch moderne Logik, die derjenigen urchristlicher typologischer Auswerkung des Alten Testaments gar nicht entspricht' (1978:191; Young 1983:171 n. 15). We have a kind of *kultgeschichtlicher Typologie* in Rom. 3:25 where the OT events are 'transcended' in their NT fulfilment (Goppelt 1939:178f.; Stuhlmacher 1975:329). The objection of a logical break is seen to be groundless as soon as one recognizes that the centre of the typology is, in actual fact, not the expiatory/propitiatory rite of blood sprinkling, but the establishment of a *new* place of expiation/propitiation which surpasses the old one. The Crucified One has become the 'place' where God has publicly and visibly caused expiation/propitiation to become a reality (Roloff 1980:456). Moreover, in an equally harsh reference in Heb. 9:11ff. Christ is represented both as high priest and sacrificial victim. This affirms that in a typological interpretation of Christ's work we may expect to find an interplay of motifs which does not necessarily satisfy the precise definition demanded by modern logic.[29]

(v). This objection assumes that Gentile-Christians in Rome were comparatively ignorant of the OT and the Levitical sacrificial rites. But this is contrary to the picture that emerges from the Book of Acts and from Paul's letters. Wherever Paul preached the Gospel in synagogues on his missionary journeys multitudes, including Jews, proselytes, and gentiles, were converted (Ac. 14:1; 17:4, 12; 18:4; 19:18). The LXX, the sacred Scriptures of the Synagogue, was the means of instructing in the old Testament proselytes as well as gentile converts to Christianity. This instruction must have been thorough for the Apostle frequently assumes an intimate acquaintance with the OT in his readers, and especially so in the Epistle to the Romans (cf. Cremer 1962:736). In addition, great numbers of pilgrims frequented Jerusalem from all over the *oikoumenē* on occasion of the great annual feasts. We find, for instance, Jews and proselytes also from Rome on the Day of Pentecost (Ac. 2:10). We have every reason then to believe that Paul's readers in Rome were intimately

[29] Davies 1948:239, points out that this objection 'could only apply if Paul were writing a scientific treatise where terms would be precisely defined.'

acquainted with the LXX and through the LXX with the Levitical sacrificial ritual of the OT.

3. The Translation of Hilastērion

It is scarcely possible that a consensus of opinion will be reached before the end of time on the question as to how the word *hilastērion* is to be translated in Rom. 3:25. The variety of linguistic possibilities, the theological questions involved, the conflicting dogmatic presuppositions of researchers, all play a role in the debate surrounding our understanding of the term. Now, if the viewpoint advocated here is valid, namely, that the Apostle alludes primarily to the *kappōret* and the Day of Atonement, then a cultic-typological interpretation of the word is obviously the right one. The question, however, is how this typical understanding can be best reflected in a translation. We find a rather curious phenomenon that although the typological interpretation has over the centuries never lacked able and eminent advocates in the exegesis, Bible translations, even in conservative circles, have always refrained from employing a corresponding translation. With the possible exception of *Rotherham,* Luther's 'Gnadenstuhl' has not found imitation in modern Bible translations. Even translators who adhere to AV's 'mercy seat' for *kappōret* in the OT (RV, RSV) prefer with AV, not to use the same rendering in Rom. 3:25.

How should we explain this strange disjunction between exegesis and Bible translations? Is it perhaps that it is felt that there is a twofold focus in the word *hilastērion—a literal allusion to the kappōret* itself, and an allusion to its cultic significance—which the translator finds impossible to reflect properly in a translation? Is it that it is felt that to render *hilastērion* with 'mercy seat', or some such rendering, would give a too concrete focus to what some consider as a rather 'ambiguous allusion' to the *kappōret*? Is it that in some instances theological biases outweigh all other considerations? Is it perhaps that it is felt that the expression 'mercy seat' is liable to create more difficulties to Bible readers than it solves?—since the word 'seat' just as Luther's '(Gnaden)*stuhl*' cannot be taken in a literal sense. Be it as it may, and recognizing that grave difficulties face the Bible translator here, one would expect that some Bible translations would, nevertheless, opt for a rendering where the idea that Christ-on-the-cross has become to the world all that the *kappōret* was for Israel would be called to mind more potently.

The dynamic-equivalent method of translation employed in

most recent Bible translations does not offer much help for bringing into focus the typological allusions involved in the word *hilastērion* in Rom. 3:25. The designation '*nomen loci*' (para. 2 above) does not reflect the semantic categories included in *hilastērion.* We noticed that two functions in particular are connected with the *kappōret/hilastērion.* The first function, namely, that of the place of meeting between God and his people, belongs to the semantic domain of object—words (O). However, at this *place* there occurred, at the same time, on the Day of Atonement, a complex of events which are inseparably connected with the *hilastērion,* viz. a 'meeting' itself between God and Israel; the sprinkling of the sacrificial blood; the ensuing divine forgiveness of sins; and the resultant *restitutio in integrum* of Israel. Thus there is also a complex Event-element (E) connected with the word *hilastērion.* Whenever a semantic E-element is included in an O-word the focus is on the E-element in a dynamic-equivalent translation.

Two difficulties arise here. One, the O-element can hardly be ignored. For the reader the word *kappōret/hilastērion* would call to mind not only the Event(s) of the Day of Atonement, but also the place where they were transacted. At the same time, the idea of a place is so inseparably connected with the complex of Events which were transacted there on the Day of Atonement that neither the E-element can be ignored. Two, translators understandably prefer to bring the E-element(s) into focus. But because of the complexity of the events involved diverse emphases are found: some translations bring out the sacrificial aspect (WB, NIV, NAB, etc.); others focus on some result ensuing from the blood ritual, for instance, *propitiation* (AV, RV, NASB, etc.); or *expiation* (RSV, NEB, etc.); or *forgiveness of sins* (TEV, Barclay, etc.); or even *reconciliation* (JB, TCNT). Still others bring out more than one semantic focus (WB, NIV, NAB, Moffatt, etc.)

It is obvious that the variety of semantic and dogmatic options included in the word *hilastērion* compels the translator to make a choice which in the final analysis, is rather subjective, and in addition, often reflects his peculiar dogmatic bias.

The question remains: Is it at all possible in the light of our discussion above, to bring into focus in Bible translation both the O- and (some) E- elements(s) included in the word *hilastērion* in Rom. 3:25?

A few translations have attempted this. Thus, Luther's 'Gnadenstuhl', Rotherham's 'propitiatory covering,' and in the OT, AV's 'mercy seat' (Ex. 25:17 *passim*). It may be argued, however, that the modern Bible reader with his (often) superficial knowledge of

Paul's OT background, will find it difficult to understand expressions such as 'mercy seat' or 'propitiatory covering.'

It should be recognized that the Bible translator does not have many options here: a dynamic equivalent translation does not, in itself, resolve the difficulty but rather tends to compound it; a paraphrase of some sort seems to offer the easiest way out. However, it represents a less common type of Bible translation; a more concordant translation like 'mercy seat,' etc. may need an elucidating footnote. Despite possible objections a rendering such as 'mercy seat' (or 'propitiatory covering') may in the final analysis, offer the best translation for *hilastērion* in Rom. 3:25. A footnote elucidating the OT allusions may be necessary.

4. Some Conclusions

To the present writer a few conclusions seem inescapable.

First, the case for taking *hilastērion* in Rom. 3:25 as an adjective, with or without *thûma,* is not strong. In addition to the very limited number of instances from antiquity where the adjective is used, the absence of concrete evidence of this use of *hilastērion* with *thûma,* compels us to admit that the translation in Rom. 3:25 of 'propitiatory' or 'expiatory' or 'atoning' '*sacrifice*' is no more than a remote conjectural possibility. Moore grossly overstates the case when he speaks of it as 'highly probable.'

Secondly, the attempt to find some background for the understanding of Paul's meaning of *hilastērion* in the martyr theology of 4 Macc. 17 has not been successful. For in spite of plainly recognizable similarities of thought it is especially the differences that are crucial. These differences place the Apostle's use of *hilastērion* in a totally different category from that of 4 Macc. 17. Paul's background is the Old Testament.

Thirdly, in Rom. 3:25 the word *hilastērion* is most probably a neuter accusative substantive, employed as a *nomen loci.* Despite arguments to the contrary the typical interpretation where the Apostle ascribes to Christ-on-the-cross certain properties of the *kappōret* still seems to offer the most natural and most satisfactory solution.

Finally, to reflect the cultic-typological sense of *hilastērion* in Bible translation is admittedly difficult. Bible translations constantly focus on the theological significance of the word, however that significance is envisaged. One would welcome the day when at least some Bible translations would reflect the findings of the exegesis on *hilastērion* as represented by a branch of New Testament scholarship which has been advocated over the centuries by a great number of competent authorities.

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