

SACRIFICE. - METAPHORS AND MEANING*

By Derek Kidner

In this paper my brief is to examine 'the ideas underlying such terms as propitiation, expiation, covering, cleansing, in the OT and NT'. I will devote the first half of the paper to the list of terms suggested, and the second half to a survey of the major sacrifices laid down in Leviticus, drawing chiefly on my out-of-print monograph, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament*¹ for the latter.

I SACRIFICIAL LANGUAGE

(a) *Expiation and Propitiation*

Ever since C. H. Dodd attacked the rendering of ἱλάσκομαι, in Scripture by 'propitiate',² there has been a tendency for conservatives to spring to its defence, and others to rally to the word 'expiate'. There is something of a paradox here. On the one hand, all alike agree that propitiation has uncomfortable affinities with pagan thought, and is only acceptable on the understanding that in Biblical religion the one who is propitiated is also the one who provides the means thereto, as both the OT and the NT make plain (*e.g.* Lv. 17:11; 1 Jn. 4:10),

On the other hand, expiation is a word whose hard edges so resist any softening of the doctrine of atonement that one might have expected it to be the watchword of the sterner sort. First, it has the *objectivity* which belongs to a fully scriptural atonement doctrine, for to expiate is not to offer an apology (as might suffice in order to propitiate) but to do or suffer something commensurate with the damage done, in order to expunge it. Secondly, it is a *penal* word, acknowledging both

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1. London: Tyndale Press, 1952.
2. *Hilaskesthai*, Its Cognates, Derivatives, and Synonyms, in the Septuagint', *JTS* 32 (1931) 352-360 (reprinted in *The Bible and the Greeks*; London, Hodder, 1935, 82-95).

guilt and desert, for while expiation is a kind of payment, it is more. One, does not expiate a debt, only an offence. In the third place, within the context of the doctrine of atonement, expiation confronts us very sharply with the paradox of substitution. If an offence is to be expiated, how can any but the culprit himself achieve this? This question arises far less sharply with certain other metaphors that we can use. An intercessor can propitiate an offended party on behalf of the offender; a benefactor can pay off another's debt or give a ransom for a hostage or redemption for a slave; but one man can expiate another's crime only if he is the ring-leader to whom the guilt overwhelmingly belongs, or a kinsman or compatriot close enough to be thought 'bound in the bundle of life' with the offender, or again, a man in authority who, though personally innocent, is deemed responsible for his subordinates' misdeeds and must make amends himself. In human affairs it can always be argued that his negligence must have contributed to the situation; therefore he is implicated not only by solidarity but by some degree of actual guilt, whether considerable or infinitesimal; but this cannot be so with God. Thus to speak of Christ as expiating guilt which was not His, is to raise the very questions which man's wisdom would resist.

What is conspicuously missing, however, from this rendering of ἰλασμός and its cognates is of course its admittedly primary sense in the everyday speech of the culture in which the Septuagint translators and the New Testament writers lived: namely the placating or appeasement of wrath. Against any vestige of this sense, C. H. Dodd in particular used both theological and linguistic arguments which have had considerable influence on a generation of translators and exegetes. Theologically, Dodd argued that in Scripture divine wrath evolved from a personal to an impersonal concept: 'the Wrath' being an expression retained by Paul 'not to describe the attitude of God to man, but to describe an inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe', since 'in the long run we cannot. . . attribute to Him [God] the irrational passion of anger'.³

3. *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Hodder, 1932) 23-24, commenting on Rom. 1:18.

All that I would stress here is that God is, on this view, a Being who is *under* the moral law of the universe, as a modern judge is under the law that he administers; presumably approving of it but remaining personally uninvolved as he presides over its operation. This is not the way in which God is presented to us in either the Old Testament or the New, even when allowance has been made for the anthropomorphic style in which both Testaments tend to speak. And we must not exaggerate the limitations which that style imposes. After all, anger and compassion are not the only phenomena that human everyday speech can reproduce. Fairness, calmness and objectivity are also human capacities, as real if doubtless not as common as emotional attitudes, and we have no difficulty in finding language for them. Therefore to speak anthropomorphically of God does not confine a writer to a single and misleading set of terms. Nor (to go a step further) is our Lord's enacted revelation of the Father dispassionate. We recognize in Him the same coexistence of fiery indignation and yearning grief that meet us in God's outbursts in Hosea, Deuteronomy or Isaiah. It is no cosmic civil servant whom we watch when Jesus looks around Him 'with anger, grieved at (the) hardness of heart' of His contemporaries (Mark 3:5), or when His invective against Jerusalem's hell-bound 'brood of vipers' ends in the anguished comparison of them to the brood of fledglings that He had hoped to mother (Mt. 23:33, 37). Both extremes of attitude are there, yet not as incompatibles, nor as enemies of rationality (as Dodd's disparagement of anger would persuade us), but as necessary characteristics of the God who cares to the uttermost about His world.

To go yet a further step, we can see in Christ at least a kindred disposition to that which is attributed to God by the language of propitiation. I have in mind His readiness to be *persuaded* - of which the most striking example is the story of the Syrophenician woman. The fact that this woman's persistence was itself God-given (we may be sure), and that it delighted the one whom it persuaded, is no argument against the reality of the negotiation, which was no mere piece of play-acting on either side, nor against the reality of the concession that it won in a situation that presented a choice between two equally valid decisions. This incident, by its apparent theological untidiness, reveals (I suggest) the same God of whom we read in the story of the golden calf and in the sequel to it. As

Psalm 106:23 puts it: 'Therefore he said he would destroy them - had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them'. Incidentally it is noteworthy that this 'standing in the breach' by Moses did not consist of making expiation (for this was offered and refused in Ex. 32:32f, but only of interceding to assuage the wrath that had been aroused. Moses had expressed his intention in the words . . . אֲוֹלִי אֲכַפֵּר . . . , which he proceeded to attempt by offering his life in expiation; but in the event it was propitiation that God accepted. For once at least the LXX translation, ἵνα ἐξιλάσωμαι. . . , was doubly apt: both in the technical sense of 'make atonement or expiation' which Moses evidently had in mind, and in the Greek word's basic sense of 'appease or propitiate' which expresses what God allowed to prevail on this occasion.

But this leads on to the linguistic aspect of the matter. The Old Testament has at least one clear expression for 'propitiate', namely חֲלָה פָּנִים: literally to 'soften the face' (*cf.* K-B). This is in fact the term used for Moses' initial intercession in Exodus 32:11. In nearly every case it stands for a direct appeal in the form of a request; and its normal LXX equivalent is δέομαι τοῦ προσώπου (or – τὸ πρόσωπον). But out of the dozen occurrences of the Hebrew expression there are certainly two, perhaps four, in which the means of seeking God's favour is not simply prayer but sacrifice. The first of the two clear cases is when Saul defends his failure to wait for Samuel, in the words, 'I said, "Now the Philistines will come down upon me. . . , and I have not entreated the face of the LORD"; so I forced myself and offered the burnt offering' (1 Sa. 13:12). The second is when Malachi uses this form of speech in challenging his contemporaries to try offering their worst animals to their political governor. 'Would he accept you? . . . Now implore God to be gracious to us (חֲלֹ-נָא פָּנֵי-אֵל). . . With such (זֹאת). . . from your hands, will he accept you?' (Mal. 1:9, NIV).

The two other, but less certain, places where חֲלָה פָּנִים appears to imply seeking God's favour through sacrifice are Zechariah 7:2 and 8:22f, since both of these refer to men's coming to Jerusalem to seek audience with Him. It may well be that this form of words, with its emphasis on propitiation, had become by now 'a current expression for the sacrifice and worship offered in the Temple' (as Joyce G. Baldwin puts it, commenting on the

former of these two contexts⁴); but in any case Saul and Malachi, so far apart in time, show that this was a long-established aspect of atonement as popularly understood. And before leaving this idiom we may do well to note that in one place⁵ - and a non-cultic one at that - we find instead of **חלה פנים** the expression **כפר פנים** to convey the same meaning: 'to appease or pacify'. More must be said about this later, but meanwhile it illustrates rather forcibly the fact that the verb **כפר** could be used in the persuasive sense that we associate with **חלה**, to soften or mollify, and that each could be translated by the LXX's ἐξιλάσκεσθαι τὸ πρόσωπον.

We must glance also at another well-known idiom which stresses the personal rather, than the transactional element in sacrificial worship: namely the **ריח ניחח**, familiar to us as the 'sweet-smelling savour' (AV) or the 'pleasing odour' or 'fragrant offering', rendered in the LXX and the NT (Eph. 5:2) by ὀσμὴ εὐωδίας. Both of the Hebrew words in this expression emphasize the strongly personal reaction of God to what is offered. To 'smell' an offering - or, still more, to refuse to smell it - is as subjective a term as one could find for acceptance or rejection ('I will not smell - **לא אריח** - your **ריח ניחח**, 'Lv. 26:31; cf. Am. 5:21); and the basic sense of **ניחח** is clear from its connection with the root **נוח**, 'rest' (cf., e.g., Zc. 6:8, 'they have quieted my spirit'). From all this it seems that a 'soothing' or 'pacifying' or 'propitiating' odour is where this expression, strictly speaking, starts, even though it readily shifts towards the purely pleasurable sense of the well-known 'sweet-smelling-savour'. The range of it, embracing both propitiation and (predominantly) divine appreciation, is apparent from the fact that it can be used (though only once) in connection with the sin-offering (Lv. 4:31); also, more often, with the peace-offering; and most of all with the burnt-offering, this last being the sacrifice which spoke most clearly of homage offered as a total gift and accepted as such.

To return, however, to ἰλάσκομαι, and its word-group, we must take note of C. H. Dodd's influential contribution mentioned above, and of L. Morris's exhaustive reply in

4. *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (London: Tyndale, 1972) 143.
5. Gn. 32:21 (EVV 20).

*The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross.*⁶ Dodd, it will be remembered, argues, from a selection of Hebrew words other than כפר which are translated in the LXX by ἰλάσκομαι, and its cognates, that this Greek root meant to these translators 'cleansed from sin', or 'expiate', when man was the subject of the action, and meant 'be gracious' or 'have mercy' or 'forgive' when God was the subject. And when כפר was the underlying Hebrew word, the Greek terms ἰλάσκομαι, ἐξιλάσκομαι, etc., were so far from implying 'propitiate' as to make such a rendering (in Dodd's words) 'wrong' and 'illegitimate'.⁷

To this Morris replies that, in the first place, Dodd's list of Hebrew synonyms is incomplete (possibly covering as little as 36% of the total, on R. R. Nicole's calculation⁸ - a calculation, however, in which Nicole, to my mind, somewhat overplays his hand by pressing some mere homonyms into service); but not only is the list undoubtedly incomplete: what is more significant is that Dodd has failed to take the contexts of his examples into account. 'It may be', remarks Morris, 'that on occasion, the best word with which to render ἰλάσκομαι is 'forgive' or 'purge'; but if the particular forgiveness or purging of sin is one which involves, as a necessary feature, the putting away of divine wrath, then it is idle to maintain that the word has been eviscerated of all idea of propitiation. Dodd totally ignores the fact that in many passages there is explicit mention of the putting away of God's anger, and accordingly his conclusions cannot be accepted without serious modification'.⁹ Some such examples are Exodus 32:14 in the context of the 'hot' and 'fierce' wrath mentioned in verses 11 and 12; likewise Lamentations 3:42; Daniel 9:19; 2 Kings 24:3f, to mention a few. Further, a study of the non-cultic and cultic uses of the Hebrew כפר supports the conclusion that 'the turning away of wrath' is 'an integral part' of the meaning of ἰλάσκομαι, and its cognates, and that 'propitiation' is a legitimate term to use of it, as long as we remember that this is not 'a process of celestial bribery' but arises from God's own initiative.¹⁰

6. London: Tyndale, 1965³, 144-213.

7. *JTS* 32 (1931) 360.

8. 'C. H. Dodd and the Doctrine of Propitiation', *WJT* 17 (1955) 129.

9. *Apostolic Preaching*, 156-157.

10. *Ibid.* 178.

With this, D. Hill substantially agrees, in his Greek *Words and Hebrew Meanings*,¹¹ not only in endorsing the criticism of Dodd's omission of contexts from his study, but also in concluding that the LXX translators appear to have followed the example of the Hebrew texts in using a single word to include 'ideas of expiation and propitiation within one act of atonement' (Fall, p. 36).

To take up this latter point, I suggest that these two facets of ἱλάσκομαι, as the Bible uses the word, are conveniently displayed in the only two occurrences of this verb in the New Testament. The first of them implies propitiation. In Luke 18:13 the publican prays: ὁ θεός, ἱλάσθητι μοι On this passive form, F. Bachsel comments that in pagan usage 'the passive aorist has the significance that the deity allowed itself to be made gracious. This is found specifically in the invocation ἱλάσθητι, "Be merciful". Grammatically the form. . . is passive, but the deity is regarded as active rather than passive. Prayer is used, not coercion',¹² There seems no reason to make any sharp distinction between a pagan's and an Israelite's use of this imperative.¹³

The second New Testament example is at Hebrews 2:17, which speaks of Jesus as a high priest, εἰς τὸ ἱλάσκεσθαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας. Here the accusative ἁμαρτίας most naturally implies the meaning 'expiate' for ἱλάσκεσθαι, so providing us with the second element in this partnership between propitiation and expiation. L. Morris's contention¹⁴ that the accusative here (and in Ps. 65:4 [64.4, LXX]) is generic rather than directly objective seems to me both unnecessary and a little forced. F. F. Bruce does more justice to the full content of the verb by translating it here 'to make propitiation', but adding a footnote that while the rendering 'expiate' might be justified here; yet 'if sins require to be expiated, it is because they are sins committed against someone who ought to be propitiated'.¹⁵

11. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1967.

12. *TDNT*, 3, 314-315.

13. An OT example (but with 'sins', not specifically 'sinners', as its point of reference) is Ps. 79:9 (LXX 78:9: ἱλάσθητι (Heb. כַּפֵּר) ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ἡμῶν.

14. *Apostolic Preaching* 204-205.

15. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Marshall, 1964) 41 note 57.

We must not linger over the words ἱλαστήριον and ἱλασμός in the New Testament, except to say that in *TDNT* J. Herrmann and F. Büchsel add their weight to the opinion that the כַּפֶּרֶת was rightly translated by the word ἱλαστήριον in the LXX, implying a place of atonement rather than a mere lid or cover for the ark (as Rashi *et al.*, followed by various moderns including K-B, have contended).¹⁶ Certainly in Romans 3:25 Paul is speaking of atonement, whether or not he is seeing Christ typified in the literal כַּפֶּרֶת at this point. But while Büchsel rejects the element of propitiation in this atonement, M. Black, commenting on this verse, asks 'does "expiation" do justice to the word here used (*hilastārion*)?' - and replies, 'The linguistic evidence seems to favour "propitiation"'.¹⁷

On ἱλασμός (which occurs, in the New Testament, only at 1 John 2:2 and 4:10), J. R. W. Stott points out the significance of the construction ἱλάσμος περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, which is used in both these passages. He comments: 'If what John had in mind was in reality an expiation, of which our sins were the object, the construction would surely have been a simple genitive, "the expiation of our sins". Instead he uses the preposition *peri*. The need for a *hilasmos* is seen not in "our sins" by themselves but "concerning our sins", namely in God's uncompromising hostility towards them. . . . The need for propitiation is constituted neither by God's wrath in isolation, nor by man's sin in isolation, but by both together.'¹⁸

(b) *Atonement*

Up to this point we have been chiefly dealing with the word-group centred round ἱλάσκομαι, though we have referred to the Hebrew root which chiefly underlies it in the LXX. It is time now to look more closely at this word כַּפֶּר and some parallel expressions.

16. *TDNT*, 3, 317-320.

17. *Romans* (London: Oliphants, 1973) 68.

18. *The Epistles of John* (London: Tyndale, 1964) 87.

Our two main lexicons show the chief divisions of opinion over its etymology, though both recognize that usage is more informative than origins. Usage, however, can be affected to some extent by the pedigree or, still more, the popularly accepted pedigree of a word. The two main candidates for this are words for covering and for erasing; and there is a third possibility, espoused by BDB, that the verb is a denominative, taking its colour from the noun כֹּפֶר, 'ransom'. We will look at these briefly in turn.

1) *Cover*. If, as seems quite likely, this is the thought originally behind כֹּפֶר, it seems to have had, nevertheless, remarkably little influence on the way atonement is spoken of. BDB (p. 497) suggests that in Genesis 32:21 (EVV, 20) Jacob is saying of Esau, "let me cover over his face by the present" (so that he does not see the offence); but Herrmann points out that if he were really picturing the matter in these terms he would hardly go on to say in the same sentence, 'I shall see his face'.¹⁹ A much better instance comes to mind in Psalm 32:1, where the verb כָּסָה, 'cover', is used in parallel with נִשָּׂא: 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered'. Yet, apart from Nehemiah 4:5 (3:37, Heb.), this is, as far as I know, the only clear example of this particular use of the metaphor. Elsewhere, כָּסָה is used either in a bad sense, of concealing what one should confess - one such instance coming in verse 5 of this very Psalm 32 ('I did not hide my iniquity'; cf. Jb. 31:33; Pr. 28:13) - or else in the purely social sense of not exposing someone else's faults ('hatred stirs up strife, but love covers (or, as we might say, 'draws a veil over') all offences', Pr. 10:12; cf. 17:9 [*contra* RSV]).

Perhaps, however, one should include under this heading the symbolism whereby the cloud of incense interposed a barrier between the high priest and the mercy seat on the Day of Atonement, to 'cover the mercy seat. . .lest he die' (Lv. 16:13). This is by no means the equivalent of covering sin from the sight of God, for it was covering holiness from the sight of man; but incense was used by Aaron in Numbers 16:46-48 as a kind of atoning smoke-screen, sheltering the rebels from the death they deserved. Yet the word 'cover' is not used in this

19. *TDNT*, 3, 304.

account, and we are invited to see it rather as an act of priestly *intercession* or interposition, in the comment, 'he stood between the dead and the living' (verse 48).

2) *Erase*. This etymology is based on the Akkadian *kapāru* and the related cultic term *kupparu*, bearing the meaning 'wipe off' or 'wash away', and hence 'expiate'.²⁰ Here again we can find echoes of this idea both in synonyms and in rituals of the OT. Nehemiah 4:2 (3:37, Heb.), which spoke, as we saw, of 'covering' sin, matched כסה with מחה, 'wipe out' - bringing conveniently together two of the suggested etymologies for כפר. Unlike 'cover', this second verb seems to lie close to the heart of what atonement signified. Isaiah 43:25 and 44:22 make vivid use of it, and in Psalm 51:1, 9 (3, 11, Heb.) David prays likewise that God will 'blot out' his offences, and then goes on to ask for washing and cleansing. This at once recalls to us the sprinkling and washing rituals of the law, which (in at least the extreme cases of ritual pollution) were only valid if they were based on sacrifice: that is, if the sprinkling was with blood (Lv. 14:6f., for cleansing the leper) or with water that was mingled with sacrificial ashes (Nu. 19: esp. 9,13), as Hebrews 9:13f, 22 reminds us.

This aspect of atonement does not, of course, prove that כפר was derived from a root that meant 'to wipe or wash away'; only that such metaphors were harmonious with this compendious term as it was used in Israel. But there is one place where כפר occurs, outside the cult, with just this meaning. I am not referring to Jacob's phrase about the face of Esau (although W. Robertson Smith once argued that it spoke of wiping off his black looks)²¹ but to Isaiah 28:18, where God declares: 'your covenant with death shall be annulled' (. . . בריתכם), and where, in case we doubt that meaning, the parallel is 'it shall not stand'.

3) A third etymology makes כפר a denominative, based on the noun כפר, a ransom. This is BDB's opinion, but not K-B's (though BDB still defines the verb as 'cover over' (fig.), 'pacify', 'make propitiation').

20. See K-B s.v. כפר, citing G. R. Driver, *JTS* 34 (1933) 34-38.

21. *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church* (London: Black, 18922) 38]. note 1, cited in BDB s.v. כפר.

L. Morris agrees with BDB in treating the verb as a denominative, but goes further, in that he sees the ransom payment as the dominant idea in the usage of the verb. Starting with non-cultic contexts, as do various other scholars, he points out that the half-shekel כֶּפֶר, each man's ransom in Exodus 30:12, is said to be לְכִפֹּר, 'to make atonement' (verses 15,161 - so closely are the noun and verb associated. Again, the Gibeonites in 2 Samuel 21:1-4 reply to David's question about the atonement he should make for Saul's massacre among them, by demanding not silver or gold but, in token, life for life. This is payment again, but in a more exacting form than that of Exodus 30:12; and it is echoed in the law of Numbers 35:31, 33 concerning murder: 'You shall accept no ransom' (no כֶּפֶר) 'for the life of a murderer, . . . for no expiation can' be made (לֹא-יִכָּפֵר) for the land, for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of him who shed it'.

Dr. Morris can cite other examples from the realm of civil law or custom, but admits that in the cultic realm the verb כִּפֵּר 'acquired a technical meaning which completely overshadowed any other. In most places it means "to accomplish reconciliation between God and man" without anything to indicate how that reconciliation is obtained. However (he continues) indications are not lacking that the above-mentioned relationship between *kopher* and *kipper* gives us the key'.²²

To substantiate this, he marshals many instances of the gift or payment element in the cultus, from the requirement to add one-fifth to the restitution-money for a cultic offence ('which', says Morris, 'looks uncommonly like a sort of *kopher*'²³) to the requirement that worshippers must not come emptyhanded to the pilgrim-feasts (Dt. 16:16). He concludes, 'in the cultus itself there is the thought of a ransom being paid, a ransom which we may not unjustly regard as a propitiation'.²⁴

22. *Apostolic Preaching* 167.

23. *Ibid.* 169.

24. *Ibid.* 174.

While I find many of Dr. Morris's examples less than compelling as evidence for the ransom-connotation of the gifts which accompanied certain cultic acts (which could often, to my mind, be better explained in terms of homage or gratitude; or, in the case of Aaron's incense-burning in Nu. 16, in terms of priestly intercession), I am fully convinced that ransom is one implied aspect of atonement in the OT, and an explicit aspect in the NT. But the fact that we are shown the means and the reality of atonement with great clarity, while its rationale - the theoretical 'how' of it - remains elusive, may be a warning against attempting to tie this matter up too neatly. The means, we are assured, is God's gift of sacrificial blood, shed as life for life, or soul for soul (לִכְפֹּר עַל־נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם נִפְשׁוּ. . . , Lv. 17:11). The reality is richly expressed in terms of ransom, of covering, of blotting out, of removing, of not imputing (Ps. 32:2), of remitting, of forgiving, of accepting; and we have still not exhausted the list. What single formula could cover such a universe of divine action in terms of a single mechanism?

We must be content, I suggest, to let the symbolism of the sacrificial system present itself to us bit by bit, as a set of variations rather than a symphony organized in a single movement. And we must be ready to see other aspects than atonement in it.

So we turn to the second and shorter part of this paper: the symbolism of the main levitical sacrifices.

II SACRIFICIAL SYMBOLISM

(a) *The Burnt-Offering*.²⁵ The familiar name for this has come to us from the LXX, but it is the Hebrew name, the עֹלֶה, which expresses its leading thought: 'that which ascends'. It was the upward or Godward offering *par excellence*. It was this that carried the first message from the newly cleansed earth after the Flood, when instead of the evidence of moral corruption there ascended to God a 'savour of satisfaction'. And at the House of God the perpetual fire on the altar and the lamb offered up daily at morning and evening were to be the symbols of man's response to the promise, 'There will I meet with the people of Israel' (Ex. 29:38-43).

25. Lv. 1 and 6:8ff.

But it was more than this. In the first place, it was an offering of the best that one could bring. While in any sacrifice the victim must be unblemished, in this it must also be a male, the more costly animal. And not far from the worshipper's thoughts there might well be the reflection that if Yahweh had been as the gods of the heathen, the victim might have been a firstborn child. The story of the virtual offering of Isaac as a **עֹלָה**, while it ruled out the idea, remained the heart-searching pattern of the utter devotion the burnt-offering was meant to express.

Secondly, the ritual virtually identified the donor with his victim. He had to sacrifice it himself, first laying his hand on its head, that it might be 'accepted for him to make atonement for him'. The clue to what this action meant is to be found in Numbers 8:10ff, where the Levites were appointed as substitutes for the nation's firstborn, in the service of the sanctuary. On that occasion the congregation laid their hands upon the Levites, who were then offered as a living sacrifice to the LORD. They, in their turn, then laid their hands upon the bullocks that were to be killed as their own sin-offering and burnt-offering, and were thenceforth admitted to the sanctuary. Clearly the congregation was not transferring its sins to the Levites by this action, as the sins of the nation were transferred to the scapegoat, but was rather appointing them to stand in its place, to do what a priestly people should ideally be doing itself. Likewise the sacrificial victim is received as both substitute and representative, acceptably taking the place of the one who brings it.

The third stage was atonement. In every sacrifice, whatever its character, sin must be dealt with, normally at the cost of a life; therefore blood was now cast against the altar. Without this there could be no encounter, no acceptable homage.

The fourth stage, the preparing and burning of the victim, expressed at every point the totality of this homage. First the offerer set apart the hide of the victim for the priest. It was the only portion assigned to human use (Lv. 7:8). Then he divided the carcase, which the priest must place in a set order on the wood he had arranged on the altar fire. The legs and entrails must be washed by the priest before being added to the rest for burning. The whole of this

procedure was such as to impress on any thoughtful worshipper the high demand of God for a devotion that was total, pure and disciplined, worked out to the last detail, yet only acceptable through atoning blood and priestly mediation.

(b) *The Cereal Offering*.²⁶ If we take together the Hebrew name and the ingredients of this offering, the associations of the two will give us an idea of its place in the sacrificial scheme, in addition to the fact that it was not offered on its own but as an accompaniment to the Burnt Offering and Peace Offering. The name, *מנחה*, meant simply a gift - especially the formal present one might offer as a courtesy (e.g. the wedding present of Ps. 45:12 (13, Heb.)), or the tribute payable to an overlord. But the ingredients and the variety of ways in which they could be cooked suggest the preparing of a meal, using the best of one's everyday resources of flour, oil and salt, as for an honoured guest or indeed for any guest properly welcomed.

An important clue to the significance of this is the emphatic reminder in Leviticus 2:13 that on no account must salt be missing from the *מנחה*, for it is 'the salt of the covenant with your God'. We are told that after the covenant-making at mount Sinai the elders of Israel were given the additional seal on the covenant in that 'they beheld God, and ate and drank' in His presence (Ex. 24:9-11). It seems likely therefore that the 'memorial portion' (*אזכרה*) of the *מנחה*, offered by fire and with frankincense to the LORD, was to bring to God's remembrance not simply the offerers but the covenant in which they stood. And with God, as B. S. Childs has put it, 'the essence of (His) remembering lies in his acting toward someone because of a previous commitment'.²⁷ Perhaps it is not pressing the matter too far to see this offering as combining the honour due to God as guest and the tribute due to Him as overlord.

26. Lv. 2 and 6:14-18.

27. *Memory and Tradition in Israel* (London: SCM, 1962).

(c) *The Peace Offering*.²⁸ Here it was the worshippers who were guests, eating before the LORD. But first the animal which was to furnish the feast must be offered with a ritual that was identical with the preliminaries to the burnt-offering, in that the worshipper laid his hand on the victim before slaying it, and the priest cast the blood against the altar to make atonement. This was followed by what may be called a token burnt-offering, for the offerer brought with his own hands certain portions (chiefly the fat) to the altar as a fire-offering, where the priest burnt them on the existing burnt-offering, for 'a sweet savour to the LORD'.

Only when these two steps of atonement and dedication were complete, was the offerer free to proceed towards the feast. Even now he must first provide the priest with his portions, the breast and thigh, which had their own ritual of being waved and heaved up before the LORD - that is, of being presented to Him and received back at His hands.

Now the festal company, who must be ceremonially clean, could eat and rejoice before the LORD. And there is an intriguing detail added to the regulations where the peace-offering is intended not as a vow or gift but as a thankoffering: namely that in this case, unlike the others, the whole feast must be over in a day (Lv. 7: 15f). The reason (I have suggested, elsewhere) is one that we should have discovered soon enough in putting the rule into practice. We should have found ourselves physically unable to offer our thanks to God in the prescribed time without inviting a considerable number of friends to help us - which is as it should be. Our vows or devotion, on the other hand, could have been shared, had we wished, with a smaller circle. But what was certainly excluded altogether was the notion of a peace-offering of any kind in which nobody but the offerer had a share. It was to express peace in its maximum sense of wholeness and fellowship - with God, with His ministers and with one's friends.

28. Lv. 3 and 7:11-34.

(d) *The Sin Offering and Guilt Offering*.²⁹ The offerings which we have already considered were brought not by command but as the worshipper felt moved. This implied that relations between him and God were relatively happy - though indeed far from perfect, as the shed blood and impassable threshold testified. But the Sin- and Guilt- Offerings were prescribed for breaches of that fellowship, and the element of atonement was now paramount. We shall take the two together, since the Guilt-Offering differed from its companion only in that it applied to cases which could be assessed for monetary compensation in addition to being offences against God.

The special marks of this class of sacrifice are seen in the treatment of the blood and the disposal of the carcass. The blood was handled with special ceremony, emphasizing the need to restore access to the presence of God. For the sin of the high priest or of the whole congregation, the blood was sprinkled with the finger seven times before the veil (and indeed once a year within the veil) and applied also to the two altars. For a ruler or a private individual it was daubed on the horns of the main altar before being poured out at its base.

After this there remained the disposal of the carcass. If the blood had been brought into the sanctuary, the offering was complete, and the carcass was now carried outside the camp to a clean place where the ashes of other sacrifices were poured out, and there it was destroyed by fire. But if the blood had not been brought in, the ceremony was completed by the priest's eating of the victim in a holy place.

At first sight this may seem the least significant part of the proceedings. But it has a bearing on the doctrine of atonement which is of some interest. The question it raises is whether or not the sins of the offerer were transferred to the victim. That the whole carcass, including even the hide, should be taken outside the camp and destroyed, may seem to point to its pollution. This impression is reinforced when we learn that in the cases where it was the priests' duty, instead, to eat it, this was in order 'to bear the iniquity of the

29. Lv. 4:1-6:7; 6:24-7:10.

congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD' (Lv. 10:17). But there are at least three objections to such a theory. (i) The offering of the fat as a sweet savour (Lv. 4:31) would hardly have been acceptable had the offerer's sin become attached to the victim. (ii) The flesh was in fact pronounced 'most holy' (Lv. 6:24-29). (iii) The ashes of other sacrifices besides this one were disposed of in the same place outside the camp; yet it was 'a clean place' (Lv. 4:12). Polluted carcasses would have defiled it.

It seems, then, that we must interpret this 'bearing of iniquity' in the sacrificial meal in some other way than as the eating of the offerer's sin (which is in any case an unparalleled idea). The key is perhaps to be found in the need for a symbol of God's acceptance of the sacrifice. In the burnt-offering the ascending smoke suggested this. In the peace-offering, fellowship was sealed by the feast. In the sin-offering, the blessing desired was restoration of access to God's presence. For the congregation as a whole, this was seen to be granted when the priest was admitted into the Holy Place or the Holy of Holies, bearing the blood which was the evidence of atonement. For the individual, a similar assurance was given when the same priest (Lv. 6:26) who had offered his sacrifice now represented him at God's table, and was accepted.

Yet when this has been said, it must be added that the symbolism of the sin-offering was not complete without one instance, once a year, in which sins were indeed pictured as transferred to a victim. On the Day of Atonement, one of the two goats which together constituted the sin-offering, was burdened with the nation's sins, confessed over it by the high priest, whose hands were laid upon its head. Then this goat was led away to the wilderness, 'to bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited' (Lv. 16:5, 20-22).

The words have a fine ring of comprehensiveness, and the picture is unforgettable. But as soon as we ask what were the iniquities that a sin-offering could take away, we are answered (at least with any certainty) only by a list of negligences, accidents and what Hebrews 9:7 sums up as 'ignorances' (ἀγνοήματα). The climax of atonement in this elaborate sacrificial system could barely touch the matters that lie most heavily upon the

sinner. Here above all, the Old Covenant cried out for the New, and we can feel afresh the force of the famous statement of the case in Hebrews 9:9ff:

According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper, but deal only with food and drink and various ablutions, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

. . . For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ. . . purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

- To which we must add the corollary, however well-known, of Hebrews 10:19ff:

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, . . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. . . . for he who promised is faithful.