

the PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL

Advocating continuation of a Presbyterian Church loyal to Scripture and the Reformed faith

Christ Our Mercy Seat

If, as Romans 1:18 says, "We see divine retribution revealed from heaven and falling upon all the godless wickedness of men" (New English Bible), then how (we ask) is this retribution to be averted?

The answer comes in Romans 3:25 where Jesus, by virtue of His sacrificial death, is presented as our *hilasterion*, our mercy seat (which is the meaning borne by the word in the Septuagint), for the removal of sin from the divine presence where it inevitably incurs wrath, as well as from the human conscience.

The important point is that God takes the initiative and provides the *hilasterion*; it is not an offering that the sinner makes to appease God. When this is kept in mind, the word may quite happily be rendered "propitiation." A propitiation that God provides is quite different from something that the sinner might try to do to propitiate God.

—F. F. Bruce,
Quoted in *Creative Minds in
Contemporary Theology*.
(See p. 9)

S. S. LESSON AND YOUTH PROGRAM FOR DECEMBER 20
CIRCLE BIBLE STUDY FOR JANUARY

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MAILBAG

THAT PROPERTY QUESTION

Dr. Walter R. Courtenay has written an excellent article in the Nov. 4 *Journal*, with which all who are committed to the distinctives of the Reformed faith will agree.

However, he makes one statement whose accuracy should be questioned. He says, "In the UPUSA

Church it (church property) belongs to the presbytery, and is so stated in its standards."

There is a general assumption that this is so, but this assumption is based not on the standards but upon interpretations of the standards. Our Form of Government does put restrictions upon the sell-

ing, leasing, mortgaging of church property but the rationale of these restrictions is not stated. There is no explicit statement to support the assumption that the congregation holds its property in trust for the denomination. In fact an amendment to the Form of Government with this intent was rejected by the Church in 1930.

—(Rev.) J. Clyde Henry
Lambertville, N. J.

the PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL

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WEEKEND OF EVANGELISM

A weekend of lay instruction in personal evangelism was held in the Cliffwood Presbyterian Church on October 9, 10 and 11. It was led by Bill Stevenson and Chip Howell, two Presbyterian elders from Smyrna, Ga. who are giving one weekend a month to sharing with and training other laymen in the work of personal evangelism.

About twenty adults attended the opening session on Friday evening, including elders, deacons, Sunday School teachers and other adults. On Saturday morning 17 adults were present for the instruction which included a period in which trainees paired off in teams and went through practice sessions in presenting the Gospel and seeking commitment to Christ. Later on Saturday afternoon the trainees went out with experienced callers to make actual evangelistic calls in homes.

On Saturday evening, a hamburger cookout was held for the Junior and Senior High Youth. Bill Stevenson and Chip Howell talked to the youth about personal faith in Jesus Christ, and how youth can witness for Christ. At the close of the meeting four young people asked to receive Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

On the Lord's Day morning, a sharing time was held in the combined adult Sunday School classes. That afternoon four teams went out to make calls in homes. Four decisions were made to receive Christ. The evening service was devoted to a time of praise and testimony with five members of the congregation giving personal testimony as to what God had done for them during this weekend. At the close of the service, three adults came forward to receive Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

I do believe that the Spirit has blown upon the members of our church these past few days. Yes, a

He Propitiates Himself

WILLIAM C. ROBINSON

In a day when so many are shying off from the great Gospel word "propitiation," it is a pleasure to find it used by Scotland's leading theologian.

T. F. Torrance makes a penetrating appeal for us to get our knowledge of God exclusively from Himself, namely, God in Christ Jesus. In his recent book, *Theological Science*, the Edinburgh professor states, "He (God) propitiates Himself." Later in the same profound study, Dr. Torrance quotes with approval from the King James Version:

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might have life through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (I John 4:9-10).

Accurate Rendering

In stating that God propitiates Himself, Dr. Torrance is taking a term which fairly translates three or four New Testament passages, a term used in the apocryphal writings, in the Church fathers, the creeds, the scholastics and the Reformers.

Propitiation occurs in Romans 3:25; I John 2:2, 4, 10; and in some renderings of Hebrews 2:17. The word is found in the King James, in the 1881 English Revised Version, in the 1901 American Standard Version and in Moffatt. Other notable scholars who defend this rendering

of the Greek include James Denney, Leon Morris and Roger Nicole.

Dr. Torrance insists that we reconstruct our thinking of God. We should begin with what God has done and does do, rather than with logical formalizations. When we do so, "behind creation and fall there remains God eternally and infinitely loving and wise." In the cross of Christ, "faith penetrates deeply into the understanding of the faithfulness of God, for there He is found at work in the depth of measureless evil amid the unappeaseable agony of mankind overcoming contradiction, achieving reconciliation and bringing unity through atonement."

Both Subject and Object

This means that God is the subject of this tremendous work. God initiates propitiation. All things are of God who did reconcile us to Himself in Christ. This is His action. In His gracious freedom He willed to change the relation between His holy being and us, His rebellious and estranged creatures.

The Book of Romans begins with the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness (1:18). But after it has presented Christ's propitiatory sacrifice (3:25), it declares that those who are justified by His blood and reconciled to God by the death of His Son are saved from the wrath of God through Him (5:9-10).

God loved the world and therefore He sent His Son. It is the grace of God that brings salvation. All these things are of God (II Cor. 5:18). "When the New Testament unfolds the ways of Christ's sacrifice," wrote G. C. Berkouwer in *The*

Work of Christ, "it does not by any means blur the divine initiative. On the contrary, exactly at this point it brings out and emphasizes the love and sovereignty of God's activity. Indeed, Christ is the propitiation, but it is God who has set Him forth to be a propitiation" (Rom. 3:25). Again, "A propitiation that God provides is quite different from something that the sinner might try to do to propitiate God," wrote F. F. Bruce.

The Scots theologian puts the matter succinctly: God propitiates Himself. That is, God is the object as well as the subject of this tremendous transaction, just as God is both subject and object in other ways:

God the Holy Spirit inspires worship and we worship the triune God. God gives faith, the Spirit works faith, and yet faith is trusting God, entrusting oneself to the faithfulness of the God of the promises. God in Christ does enough and bears enough to satisfy the just requirements of the holy God, to vindicate His righteousness, to manifest His truthfulness to His Word.

As Denney brings out, there is a proper sense in which the Augsburg Confession, the Thirty-nine Articles and our Larger Catechism are right in saying that God is reconciled. This does not mean that an outside person or force changed His mind. Christ is God the Son.

Nor does it mean that God's mind was changed from hate to love. He always loved us with an everlasting love. As Calvin wrote, in an inefable way God both loved and hated us at the same time; His love so acted in Christ as to put us in the changed relationship and standing of reconciled, justified children of His love.

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Christ did this by taking upon Himself the punishment which we deserve and bearing it in our stead on the cross. He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. He was made sin and a cure for us that He might give us His righteousness, pardon, peace, sonship, fellowship

with the Father here and hereafter.

As Moses stood before God in the breach to turn away His wrath (Psa. 106:23), so God in Christ averted from us the wrath of the holy God by giving Himself in our stead. The Lamb of God took away the sins of the world.

Accordingly, in our Standards we confess: "Christ's one sacrifice (is) the only propitiation for all our sins." If one dismisses as myth the concepts which express the Godward relation of the cross, he loses the apostolic Gospel which centers in Jesus Christ the crucified. ☐

The first major study of George Whitefield's life in over a century —

A Great Evangelist

GEORGE WHITEFIELD: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE GREAT EVANGELIST OF THE 18TH CENTURY REVIVAL, by Arnold Dallimore. The Banner of Truth Trust, London, Eng. 598 pp. \$7.50.

A most significant date this year has been allowed to slip by all but unnoticed by the great bulk of Americans. We are in the habit of marking the anniversaries of the births and deaths of great men, the day on which this or that event took place in history. But very often we remember that which was really of lesser importance and quite pass over what was in fact far more crucial, far more decisive in the history of the Church and nation.

On the 30th day of September, 1970, it was exactly 200 years since George Whitefield went to be with the Lord. Whitefield's name is not nearly so well known or highly sung now as that of John Wesley. Yet in the 18th century itself, that tremendous century of stirrings and revivings in the Church, both in Great Britain and in America, he was styled the "patriarch of the Methodists" by Walpole or the "chief of the Methodists" by Foote.

There can be no doubt that in his own time Whitefield was far better known and far more widely used as a preacher than any of his contemporaries,

including John Wesley. Some have gone so far as to call him one of the greatest preachers and evangelists the Church has ever seen. Dargan wrote: "The history of preaching knows no greater or more worthy name than George Whitefield," and such estimates could be multiplied almost without number.

First of Two Parts

In view of the neglect of Whitefield's true greatness and the ignominy to which his name has so frequently been exposed, one is especially glad to be able to note the fact that a new biography has appeared, the first major one in a hundred years, certainly in design the fullest ever to be undertaken. One should no doubt say, "has begun to appear," for the present volume is but the first in a series of two, and deals only with half of the great preacher's extraordinary life, to the time when he was 26 years old.

Even if the second part of the work never appears — one hopes, to

be sure, for its speedy publication — the Christian world will long be under a weighty obligation to Arnold Dallimore, the author, who has spent 20 years of his life to give us what we have so far. The publishers are also to be saluted for once again providing us with a beautifully printed, attractively bound, well designed, and reasonably priced volume, a book it is a pleasure to hold in one's hands.

It is difficult to know where to begin in saying anything at all about a book of this sort. One can criticize, of course. There are always things which one wishes were otherwise, and the present work is no exception. But adverse criticism in this instance would be particularly obvious, inasmuch as the Church has great need for just what Dallimore is able to give us. I shall have to restrict myself, therefore, to a few comments, and then urge all readers of this review to become acquainted with the book for themselves.

Supreme in His Day

First of all, it is worthy of remark that Dallimore's book begins to do justice to the life of Whitefield. Supreme as a preacher in his own day — though he would himself have been the first to deny it, and his humility is not the least attractive feature of his personality — subsequent years have seen a diminishing of his fame and an exalting of that of John Wesley.

Wesley was, certainly, a great man, but later generations have tended to exaggerate his importance over

Christ Alone

Whatever other philosophers may have been, He alone is a teacher from heaven; He alone is able to teach certain and eternal wisdom; He alone teaches things pertaining to our salvation because He alone is its author; He alone practiced what He preached, and is able to make good what He promised. — ERASMUS.

On the 200th anniversary of George Whitefield's death, a new biography published in England is available through the Puritan Publications, Inc., Carlisle, Pa. 17013. The author of the review is pastor of the Williamsburg Presbyterian Church, Kingstree, S. C.