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DESECRATION AND DEFILEMENT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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Problem. The Hebrew roots hll and tm^{p} have been translated interchangeably by the terms "desecration" and "defilement." Since the root hll is used in opposition to the root qdš , while tm^{p} stands in opposition to thr , it remained to be investigated whether the equation is justified because they appear in parallel or whether they should be visualized as belonging to two different realms and having different meanings.

Method. My approach was basically a synchronical word study. All the appearances of the roots hll and tm^{p} in the OT were analyzed. The roots hnp and g^{l} , as well as some secondary roots related to the subject, were also investigated. Consideration was given to texts where the idea of desecration or defilement was present although the terminology was absent. The literature of the ancient Near Eastern cultures was investigated to establish to what extent their concepts of desecration and defilement were similar or not to those of Israel.

Results. This investigation showed that the ancient Near Eastern cultures had a developed concept of defilement, recognized by the emphasis placed on purification. Their idea of holiness, however, lacked the majestic dimension found in Israel. As a result, their concept of desecration was limited to its taboo dimension.

The study of the Hebrew roots hll , tm^{p} , and other secondary roots revealed that they are used for different purposes in the OT. Textual evidence shows that the biblical writers moved from hll to tm^{p} , depending on the object visualized or the emphasis intended. While holy tangible

realities may be desecrated and defiled, intangible realities such as the Sabbath, the Name, and Yahweh are not affected by defilement. The expression *hll* knows no sources of uncleanness, as is the case of *tm*²; rather, *hll* action deprives something or someone of holiness, while *tm*² adds to such a defiling dimension. While *hll* may have Yahweh as subject or object, *tm*² acts have no effect on him, nor does he perform *tm*² activity.

Conclusion. The roots *hll* and *tm*² have different meanings in the OT, and their equation does not seem justified. Consequently, *hll* should be rendered basically by the word "desecration," while *tm*² by the term "defilement."