THE TASK OF OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

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I. THE PROBLEM

A. The Old Testament contains a plurality of theologies. This fact is well established exegetically. It represents the theological problem of the Old Testament. And the discipline of Old Testament theology is constituted by the task of addressing this problem.¹ The theological problem of the Old Testament does not arise from the separate existence of its particular theologies. It arises from their co-existence. The co-existence of these theologies in the Old Testament demands the interpretation of their relationship or correspondence, a task that is more than and different from the interpretation of each of them in its own right which is done in historical exegesis — if exegesis does its work. And while generating this central theological problem and demand the Old Testament itself offers no direct approach and answer to it.

B. In the history of the discipline of Old Testament or Biblical theology, the ever increasing awareness of the plurality of theologies, as well as the danger of the Old Testament's theological disintegration and atomization implied in that plurality, has been met with attempts to identify holistic dimensions or perspectives which pervade all the Old Testament scriptures, messages, or theologies, or which embrace or undergird them. In fact, one of the primary postulates for the task of Old Testament theology has been that the Old Testament must be understood as a whole. And the
implication seems universal that as soon as a holistic dimension can be discerned the plurality of theologies in the Old Testament can be regarded as an enriching phenomenon rather than as a critical problem because the whole by definition represents nothing other than the semantic homogeneity of the plurality.

This implication is indefensible. The fact, e.g., that a plurality of theologies is held together or even generated by a holistic reality says *eo ipso* nothing about the kinds of their relationship, i.e., whether they agree or disagree, and even less about the degrees in which certain kinds are related. What is under discussion can be exemplified by the two types of holistic reality that have played the dominant role in the recent discussion: tradition-history and the canon.

1. Ancient Israel's theological tradition-history, certainly a type of holistic reality, generated the plurality of Yahweh-theologies. Yet the same holistic process did not clarify whether and how the theologies generated by it correspond among one another. It did not clarify the nature of the theological plurality itself even as it created the pluralistic fact. It is one thing to affirm all the Old Testament's theologies as the outgrowth of the tradition-history of Israel's Yahweh-faith. It is quite a different thing to ask how they are related among themselves. The question raised in the second aspect is not all resolved by what is affirmed in the first; nor is the answer to this question of the relatedness of the plural theologies a negligible issue. As long as the nature of the plurality, i.e., the relationship of the many theologies among one another, did not become self-evident through the historical process, the unavoidable result was that the dynamic process of tradition-history generated the problem of the relationship of these theologies even as it generated their plurality. It generated the plurality of