

# Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception

## Preface

As the final volumes of the *Theologische Realenzyklopädie (TRE)*\* were being published, the editors began discussing the need for a new biblical encyclopedia. The point was made that an encyclopedia documenting not only the origins and development but also the vast influence and broad reception of the Jewish and Christian Bibles, including all their figures, themes, and motifs, would be an innovative and groundbreaking contribution to biblical scholarship. The realization that English was becoming the predominant language of discourse in religious studies and theology convinced many that the time had come for the Walter de Gruyter publishing house, long famous for its comprehensive and authoritative reference works, to produce its next major reference work in the English language. Thus the *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception (EBR)* was conceived.

On the basis of this idea, the founders of *EBR* developed a conceptual framework that gives equal footing to the various important disciplines studying the history of the Bible's reception. Thus, without privileging any interpretive tradition, *EBR* examines the histories and theologies of Judaism and Christianity, alongside reception processes in Islam and other religions and religious movements.

The same approach is applied to the areas of literature, art, music, and film. This concept, expounded in our introduction (see pp. ix–xi), deliberately seeks to include all creative developments, movements, and culture-forming influences of the past and present that can be traced back to the Bible.

Turning this basic conception into a realizable encyclopedic project, however, required approximately 10 years of preparation. The ambition of the publisher and founding editors to create an innovative encyclopedia of the Bible and its reception for the 21st century – one that would remain useful in the long term and be available both in print and online – required the utmost rigor and care. In particular, three fundamental requirements had to be fulfilled:

First, a group of editors had to be assembled who had the scholarly proficiency and comprehensive knowledge necessary to give this encyclopedic project a concrete shape and to commission the appropriate experts as contributors. In the past 10 years, what originally had been a small circle grew into an editorial team of over 30 scholars, further assisted by expert consultants. The editors became a very creative, efficient, and close-knit team, who reviewed the concept of the project periodically, never lost sight of its practical realization, and addressed problems on a daily basis. Some editors assumed their task for a number of years and then passed it on to others. We would like to express our gratitude to all editors, both those who helped in the past as well as those who are currently involved in the project, and thank them for their commitment. It is hard to imagine another editorial committee of comparable size, international make-up, and with such a large workload anywhere in the world that cooperates as successfully as does the *EBR* team. Our greatest thanks, of course, go to our authors, more than 600 of them just for the letter A. Without their expertise and cooperative spirit, this project would have remained merely a dream.

Second, in order to create an encyclopedic *kosmos*, one that reflects the order and balance suggested by that term, a detailed lemma list had to be created and classified carefully into main-lemmas, sub-lemmas, and sub-sub-lemmas, in a manner congruous with

the conception and goals of *EBR*. Individual topics needed to be discussed without losing sight of the greater ensemble to which they belong, and given a position congruent with their content and scope.

Third, a publishing house was needed with the necessary expertise and resources, the pertinent international reputation, and the willingness to bear the considerable financial risks involved. One can easily imagine the response an application for the support of *EBR* with public funds would have met, especially if one considers the uncertainties – financial, content-, and staff-related – surrounding the preparatory period; *EBR* would not have stood a chance. Projects of this magnitude require not only scholarly acuity and circumspection, but also an enterprising spirit. The publishing house of Walter de Gruyter deserves praise for displaying the entrepreneurial courage to sponsor *EBR*. Without the extraordinary dedication and vision of the current Editorial Director, Dr. Albrecht Döhnert, and of the members of the editorial team, Carsten Burfeind, Dr. Matthew A. Collins, and Dr. Uta Lehnert, it would not have been possible to launch this project. Heartfelt thanks are owed to them and to all the people in different parts of the world who contributed (and continue to contribute) to the preparation of both the printed volumes and the online version: Dr. Christoph Berner, Dr. Julia Brauch, Dan Callahan, Brandon Cline, Patricia Duncan, Celestina Filbrandt, Sophie Guericke, Elaine James, Ferdinand Kasten, Sue-Jeanne Koh, Bettina Moll, Dörte Neusser, Anne Stewart, and Dr. Jacob Wright. Finally, we would like to extend our thanks to those who supported *EBR* in the past: Dr. Hasko von Bassi and Dr. Claus-Jürgen Thornton (as Editorial Directors), and Monika Müller (as a member of the editorial team), to name just a few among many who contributed significantly to this project.

Any attempt to publish an encyclopedia dedicated to the origins and reception of the Bible cannot claim to be more than a pioneering effort, and it remains, like all scholarly efforts, subject to the precept, *dies diem docet*. With this reservation, we will consider *EBR* to have succeeded if it is found to be set out in an organized and orderly fashion, stimulates and helps to guide further research, sets a high standard of quality, and inspires the coming generations of scholars to create a new work that will surpass it.

The Editors

\* 36 volumes with 2 index volumes, Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter 1977–2007.