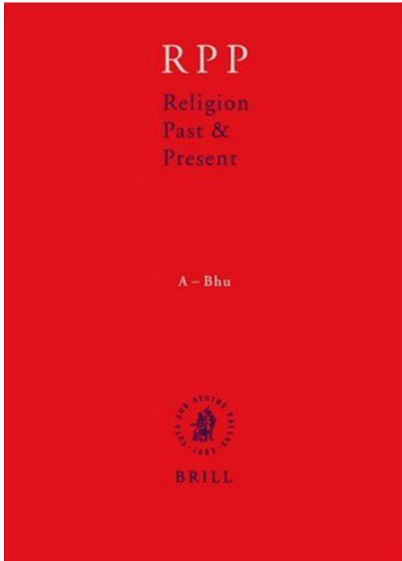


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Religion Past and Present: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion, Volume 1: A-Bhu

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Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart (RGG), recognized as the most comprehensive and authoritative existing guide to the study of religion, has been the gold standard of European encyclopedias of religion and the standard of excellence in reference works in religion for almost a century. The way in which the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are reflected in the previous three German editions of *RGG* has not been matched by any other document in the history of religious and theological scholarship. It has carefully illuminated a vast range of religion-connected subjects for the German-speaking world. The fourth edition of this encyclopedia, recently published in English under the title *Religion Past and Present (RPP)*, is an extension within this tradition of German excellence and scholarship. *RPP* is a monumental piece of scholarship!

A comparison of the four editions reveals a development in the approach of the disciplines covered in the articles. The first edition was planned to summarize the state of research of the nineteenth century with an extension of perspective beyond the traditional primary disciplines of Christianity. This basic concept was further applied in the subsequent editions, although the overall perspective and the attention given to individual subject areas were understandably subject to change as appropriate. The second edition amounted to an almost complete revision. It was characterized by increased emphasis on non-Christian religions and the interplay between religion and culture and included an

account of the results of scholarly endeavor in view of the “dynamism and abundance of present-day religious and theological life.” The third edition (1957–65) emphasized the seriousness with which the “Protestant” Christian faith was regarded at the time and its deliberate location in the increasing significant ecumenical movement among the churches.

The revolutionary development in the areas of science and technology (see, e.g., Alvin Toffler’s *Future Shock*, 1982) during the period between the third and fourth editions had a marked influence on the world of religions, and the general economic upturn and the global expansion of scholarly research led to an accumulation of knowledge. Subsequently, on the basis of new knowledge, methods, and perspectives, scholarly thinking underwent radical change. In addition to all this, a new ecumenical appreciation of the problems was established. All this contributed to the publication of a “completely revised” fourth edition (2007). There was a complete revision of the lists of subject areas and entries, and the lists of subjects and lemmata were adjusted to the new scholarly circumstances. In successive editions, the editors of *RGG* had increasingly expanded their coverage of non-Christian religious phenomena, and that coverage reached its widest extent in the new fourth edition.

The articles were contributed by the world’s leading experts in their respective fields on all phases of Christianity and also of other religions. Painstaking preparation by a team of highly competent and careful editors has resulted in an indispensable work of reference. The scope of topics is immense, and the bibliographies provide an invaluable aid for research. Another aspect of this work that is new is the inclusion of the international perspective in the commissioning of area authors, extending beyond Europe. This publication is a remarkable monument of international cooperation, and it is as up-to-date as such a monumental project could possibly be.

Some key features of this work are that it is strongly international, cross-cultural, and ecumenical (over 3,000 authors from 88 countries contributed more than 15,000 entries), and it covers an unparalleled breadth of subject matter in theological and biblical studies. Up-to-date research findings and bibliographies make it an indispensable resource for all levels of users. The articles cover a wide range of interdisciplinary topics, and the subject areas covered in this edition are: biblical and Christian archaeology; church history (from the early church to contemporary times); church music and liturgy; church law; culture, art, media, and religion; ecumenism (in Catholicism, the Orthodox Church, and the Reformed Churches); dogmatics; ethics and related social sciences; fundamental theology; a comprehensive history of religion; Judaism from early to modern times; New Testament; Old Testament/Hebrew Bible; philosophy; philosophy of religion, practical theology and related social sciences; education, religion, and science; religious studies;

and, finally, religious studies and missiology. Brief definitions and cross-references enable quick and easy searches. The fourth edition will comprise nine extensive volumes plus an index, which is scheduled to be completed in 2009. Lists of abbreviations of sources consulted (over eighty-three pages) prove the thoroughness and comprehensiveness of this encyclopedia.

The “Notes for Users” contain invaluable information to inform readers on how this encyclopedia was compiled and should be used. Four valuable notes are the following. (1) “Alphabetic Order”: In this fourth edition biblical names are given in the form customary in English usage. Individuals who lived before 1500 C.E. are generally listed under the (first) name by which they were known, whereas those who lived later are generally identified by their surnames. In names of Romance origin, articles are taken into account in the alphabetization. Families are generally referred to in chronological order. (2) “References”: The symbol → is used in cross-references to other articles dealing with the same subject matter or containing supplementary information. (3) “Abbreviations”: To facilitate use, the lemma is generally given in full when mentioned in the text. The abbreviations used correspond with those given in the lists of abbreviations. (4) “Bibliographies”: Where possible, available English translations of German works are given. Original English editions replace details of German translations given in the *RGG*. Page references generally refer to the originally cited German edition. Asterisks (*) following page numbers serve as a reminder that page numbers might differ in the English edition.

The following guidelines were applied to orient the articles. (1) Reference dictionary: The fourth edition of *RGG* (*RPP*) is regarded as a continuation of the purpose for which the first edition was compiled: to provide a reference dictionary for theology and religious studies that would give an account of the essential phenomena of religious and ecclesiastical life and of the theological reflection pertaining to this life. Despite the many changes that were deemed necessary, the traditional framework of the division of subjects remains largely unchanged. (2) Balanced information: In dealing with the evangelical heart of the Christian faith, *RPP* is presented to inform readers in the best possible way, considering the limited space available. Readers are also provided with the means to form a balanced view of other and alien religious realities in relation to their own. (3) Research: The articles offer a snapshot of the current state of knowledge, present the relevant methodological issues, and draw attention to open questions and opportunities for future research. (4) People still alive: In order to avoid imbalances in the compilation or an arbitrary selection, the editors of *RPP* have refrained from including articles on persons who are still alive. Information on significant figures in contemporary history can be found in the corresponding specialized articles via the index. (5) Bibliographies: Bibliographical information in *RPP* has been kept brief in view of the many possibilities

of access to detailed bibliographies in modern databases. Mention is made of standard works, text editions, biographies, and special monographs that are essential for scholarly work, important journal articles, and references to complete bibliographies in other publications. No bibliographies were included for the history of the interpretation of biblical books, since these are now available in up-to-date commentaries and electronic media.

Despite the fact that Germany is the home of *RGG*, the perspective of this work has always reached beyond national boundaries. This orientation was reinforced in the fourth edition, thus ensuring that the dictionary will have an even stronger international profile and will be useful as a source of information for countries beyond Europe. The publication of the new fourth edition of this encyclopedia in English finally gives the English-speaking world access to its wealth of information. *RPP* should soon become as essential for readers of English, as it has long been for those who read German. It should be regarded as an essential purchase for any academic library and would also be a worthwhile investment for many interested individuals. Unlike scores of other books, these volumes will permanently affect the course of scholarship in religion. We are sincerely grateful to every contributor.