

## PREFACE

The present issue of the journal *Sacra Scripta* is dedicated to our colleague Dr. Erik Eynikel on the occasion of his retirement in the year 2024. As a biblical scholar, Erik Eynikel taught for more than thirty years in several European and American institutes and faculties of theology or religious studies where he met students and colleagues from a wide range of national, ecclesiastical, and religious backgrounds: Heerlen, Sittard, and Nijmegen (The Netherlands), Strasbourg (France), Dallas (Texas), and Regensburg (Germany), along with guest lectureships at various other universities and courses in the field of adult religious education.

After having obtained a Master's degree in Oriental Philology and History from the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium) in 1982, he continued his education at the same university, specializing in Catholic theology and devoting himself to biblical studies in particular. In his Master thesis Erik Eynikel dealt with a problem that he later explored in greater depth in his doctoral dissertation submitted in 1989, the so-called Reform of King Josiah. As volume 33 of the series *Oudtestamentische studiën* (Brill, Leiden) this thesis was published in English with the title *The Reform of King Josiah and the Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

As a biblical scholar and a university teacher, Erik Eynikel has gone far beyond the boundaries that are characteristic of the standard program of teaching biblical exegesis and languages at theological faculties. He is well-versed in oriental languages and taught not only Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek but also Ugaritic and Akkadian. He furthermore has been involved in archaeological excavation campaigns in the Holy Land (e.g., in the Hazor excavation project). Convinced of the importance of understanding the geographical and social backgrounds of the biblical scriptures with their eyes and their hands, he was able to inspire his students to take part in excavations themselves.

The historical books of the Hebrew Bible, namely those attributed traditionally to the so-called Deuteronomistic History, specifically Judges, the Books of Samuel and the Book of the Kings (but also the Book of Jonah), remained a major focus of Erik Eynikel's research for some years. However, he very soon opened up new areas of activity. In a decade when Septuagint studies in biblical exegesis were only pursued by a few outsiders, moreover by scholars interested in biblical textual criticism or even by Classicists (the French "Bible d'Alexandrie"), he prepared the *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, together with his Flemish colleagues Johan Lust and Katrin Hauspie. The first volume of this work was published by the German Bible Society in Stuttgart in 1992. In the meantime, scholars interested in the vocabulary of the Septuagint can consult the third edition, which came out in 2015. Thus, about two centuries after the publication of Johann Friedrich Schleusner's Latin *Novus thesaurus philologico-criticus sive Lexicon in LXX et reliquos interpretes Graecos ac scriptores apocryphos Veteris Testamenti*

(1823-1829), Septuagint research has been provided with a new type of tool that offers the most important information in a compact manner: translations of all the words attested in the Septuagint, including the rare ones and *hapax legomena*, statistical information on the distribution of a given word in the main parts of the Septuagint, and finally some essential bibliographical references. Since 2011, Erik Eynikel has also been a member of the advisory board of the *Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint* of which the first volume was published in 2020 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).

Erik Eynikel is not the biblical scholar for whom solitary work in the study is the only goal in the life of a researcher. Nor does he walk along well-trodden paths. On the contrary, polyglot and sociable, he demonstrated his organizational skills more than once. He also had a good feeling for issues of which the urgency most of his colleagues were unaware of, and which had little resonance in the scientific community at the time. Long before intercultural approaches in theology in general and in biblical exegesis in particular caused attention in European research, he participated in the project of the *International Bible Commentary. A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century* (ed. W.R. Farmer et alii; Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1998). Written in a language that is commonly understood by readers not familiar with ancient languages and the results of biblical scholarship, this commentary was groundbreaking insofar as its collaborators had a large scale of national and confessional horizons. Furthermore, the commentary addresses questions that were rarely dealt with in European or North American biblical research at the end of the last millennium, e.g. “Family: An African perspective” and “The Bible and Ecology”. Only three years later, in collaboration with Flemish and Dutch colleagues, Erik Eynikel published the Dutch edition of this commentary (Kampen: Kok, 2001); a completely revised edition is planned. Needless to say these topics are now attracting greater attention, especially where Western scholars are open to the dialogue with colleagues from Africa, Latin America, Asia or Oceania, insisting on the urgency of the said problems. Nevertheless, there is a need for pioneers who break new ground for new issues to enable the biblical message to unfold its impact in new situations and new scenarios.

Another project benefited a great deal from Erik Eynikel’s organizational talent. It touches only slightly on the results of biblical research though the latter does not prove useless for the initial objective that can be outlined as follows: On the one hand, in view of growing conflicts in Europe, there is a consensus that religions have an important part to play in them. On the other hand, the question arises of whether it is possible to recognize the potential that religions can bring to the social debate on the way to conflict resolution. The last question in particular was based on the conviction that public schools play a key role regardless of whether the respective national legislation provides for religious education in state schools or not. In some countries, issues of religion are dealt with in courses of,

e.g., history, literature, ethics. Anyway, the project was named “Teaching Religion in a Multicultural European Society” (TRES). The organizational structure that made this interdenominational, interdisciplinary and transnational research possible was a project funded by the European Commission as part of the Socrates program at the time. Its aim was to produce in particular an English manual providing both university professors and school teachers with the material necessary to better understand the religious, historical, social, political and psychological ingredients in contemporary debate on religion and violence. From 2006 to 2008, around fifty scholars from almost all countries of the European Union met in Uppsala (Sweden), Cluj-Napoca (Romania) and Nijmegen/Kleve (The Netherlands/Germany) to share their experiences and to prepare the volume already mentioned. This manual was eventually published in 2011 (E. Eynikel, A. Ziaka [eds.], *Religion and Conflict. Essays on the Origins of Religious Conflicts and Resolution Approaches*, London: Harptree Publishing, 2011). Unfortunately, the initiative that led to the creation of the TRES project has not been continued on a European level, for whatever reason.

It is difficult to list the diverse activities of a researcher who is at home in many areas of biblical and extra-biblical scholarship, but who at the same time does not fail to recognize the relevance of religion and theology for current debates. The articles collected in this volume are inspired by Erik Eynikel as a researcher and academic teacher insofar as they cover a wide range of topics: from the Hebrew Bible to the Septuagint, from the New Testament to early Christian literature and the Vulgate. Nevertheless, they have in common the interest in philological, historical and exegetical details as well as their importance for biblical research.

In conclusion, looking forward with curiosity to the initiatives, projects and publications with which he will enrich biblical scholarship in the future we wish Erik Eynikel many fruitful years, without academic obligations and university bureaucracy. We would like to express our gratitude to the contributors to this volume who have shared with Erik Eynikel common interests and projects. We are indebted to the editorial board of the journal *Sacra Scripta*, especially Prof. Dr. Stelian Tofană, who accepted to publish this thematic issue.

Finally, thanks are due to Ms. Hilda Marczinkó for her indispensable and tireless help in producing this volume.

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