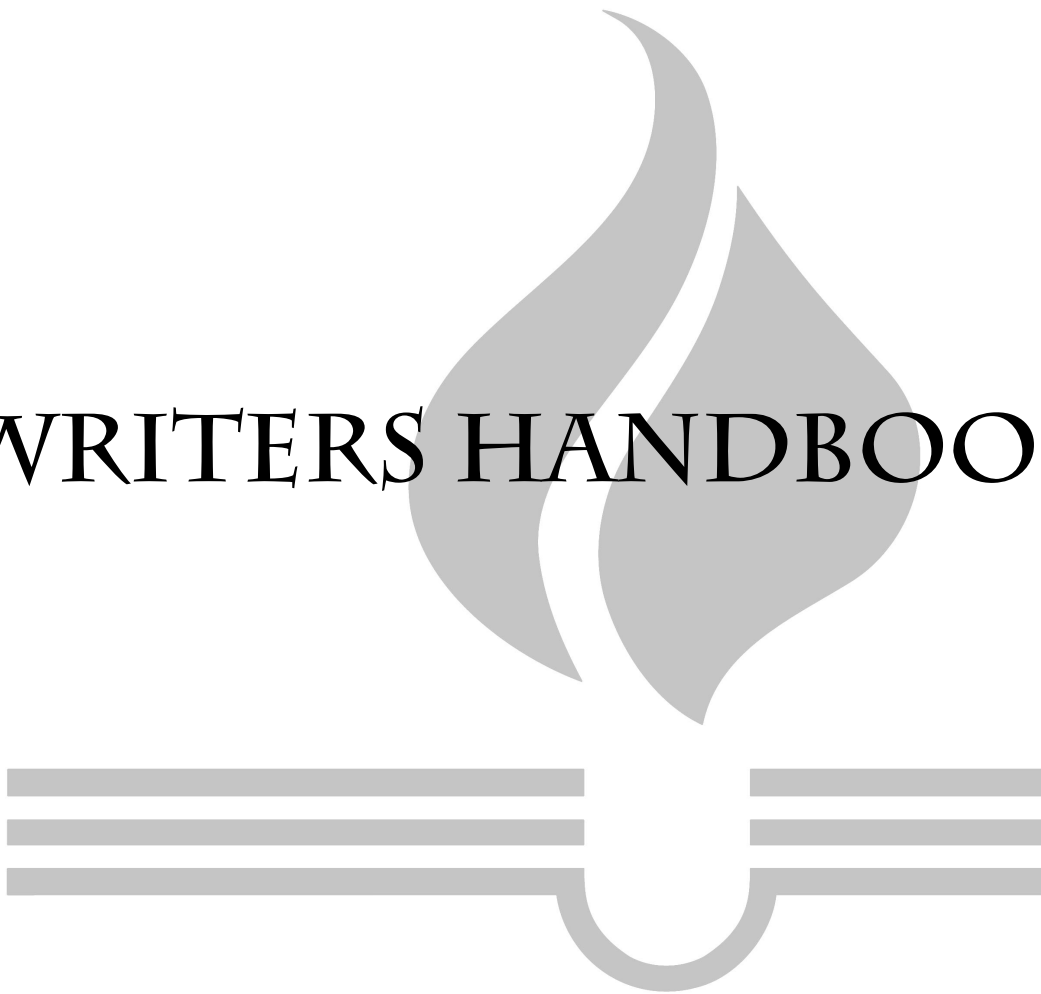


**BELIEVERS CHURCH BIBLE  
COMMENTARY**

**WRITERS HANDBOOK**



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# Series Foreword

The Believers Church Bible Commentary Series makes available a new tool for basic Bible study. It is published for all who seek more fully to understand the original message of Scripture and its meaning for today—Sunday school teachers, members of Bible study groups, students, pastors, and others. The series is based on the conviction that God is still speaking to all who will listen, and that the Holy Spirit makes the Word a living and authoritative guide for all who want to know and do God's will.

The desire to help as wide a range of readers as possible has determined the approach of the writers. Since no blocks of biblical text are provided, readers may continue to use the translation with which they are most familiar. The writers of the series use the *New Revised Standard Version*, the *Revised Standard Version*, the *New International Version*, and the *New American Standard Bible* on a comparative basis. They indicate which text they follow most closely, and where they make their own translations. The writers have not worked alone, but in consultation with select counselors, the series' editors, and the Editorial Council.

Every volume illuminates the Scriptures; provides necessary theological, sociological, and ethical meanings; and, in general, makes "the rough places plain." Critical issues are not avoided, but neither are they moved into the foreground as debates among scholars. Each section offers explanatory notes, followed by focused articles, "The Text in Biblical Context: and "The Text in the Life of the Church." [Note: In 2004, the following sentence was added to the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph and replaced the 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph:] This commentary aids the interpretive process but does not try to supersede the authority of the Word and Spirit as discerned in the gathered church.

[The writers have done the basic work for each commentary, but not operating alone, since "no . . . scripture is a matter one's own interpretation" (2 Pet 1:20; cf. 1 Cor 14:29). They have consulted with select counselors during the writing process, worked with the editors for the series, and received feedback from another biblical scholar. In addition, the Editorial Council, representing six believers church denominations, reads the manuscripts carefully, gives churchly responses, and makes suggestions for changes. The writer considers all this counsel and processes it into the manuscript, which the Editorial Council finally approves for publication. Thus these commentaries combine the individual writers' own good work and the church's voice. As such, they represent a hermeneutical community's efforts in interpreting the biblical text, as led by the Spirit.]

The term *believers church* has often been used in the history of the church. Since the sixteenth century, it has frequently been applied to the Anabaptists and later the Mennonites, as well as to the Church of the Brethren and similar groups. As a descriptive term, it includes more than Mennonites and Brethren. *Believers church* now represents specific theological understandings, such as believers baptism, commitment to the Rule of Christ in Matthew 18:15-10 as crucial for church membership, belief in the power of love in all relationships, and willingness to follow Christ in the way of the cross. The writers chosen for the series stand in this tradition.

Believers church people have always been known for their emphasis on obedience to the simple meaning of Scripture. Because of this, they do not have a long history of deep historical-critical biblical scholarship. This series attempts to be faithful to the Scriptures while also taking archaeology and current biblical studies seriously. Doing this means that at many points the writers will not differ greatly from interpretations that can be found in many other good commentaries. Yet these writers share basic convictions about Christ, the church and its mission, God and history, human nature, the Christian life, and other doctrines. These presuppositions do shape a writer's interpretation of Scripture. Thus this series, like all other commentaries, stands within a specific historical church tradition.

Many in this stream of the church have expressed a need for help in Bible study. This is justification enough for the Believers Church Bible Commentary. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit is not bound to any tradition. May this series be an instrument in breaking down walls between Christians in North America and around the world, bringing new joy in obedience through a fuller understanding of the Word.

## A Brief History of the BCBC Project

The idea of a commentary produced by the Believers Church came from Ben Cutrell of Mennonite Publishing House in 1977. This idea was tested with the Mennonite Publication Board, the General Board, and the other program boards of the Mennonite Church later that year. It was also tested in a combined meeting of Inter-Mennonite seminaries and college Bible faculties the same year. Later that year a comprehensive proposal was prepared which promoted the idea of twelve volumes of 4,390 pages and a budget of one million dollars. The proposal was not accepted.

In the fall of 1978 the Mennonite Publication Board accepted a more modest proposal in which writers would be remunerated through a regular royalty arrangement and it was not assumed all books of the Bible would be covered. An ad hoc committee met in early 1979 and worked further on the proposal. This was followed by the publication board deciding to invite other Anabaptist groups in the Believers Church tradition to join in and make it an inter-Mennonite project.

On June 2, 1980, a Commentary Selection Committee met. Persons present came from the Mennonite Church, General Conference Mennonite Church, Brethren in Christ Church, Church of the Brethren and Mennonite Brethren Church along with some persons from Mennonite Publishing House. They worked on administrative plans for the commentary project. On December 12, 1980 representatives from the five denominations met again and agreed that there should be an OT Editor and a NT Editor, and an Editorial Council with one representative from each of the participating denominations. Herald Press would be the publisher. Much of the success of this meeting came as a result of the good work Ben Cutrell had done on the project since the prior meeting. Thereafter the Editorial Council has met yearly.

In 1981 the Editorial Council agreed on the name, *Believers Church Bible Commentary*. The Editorial Council outlined its task, defined the work of the Editors, agreed writers should have consultants, and Herald Press would assume financial responsibility and carry out the details of publishing the series. About 60 potential writers were identified. Elmer A. Martens was appointed OT Editor and served as editor from 1981 to 2003.

In 1982 Howard H. Charles was present as the NT Editor. A draft of a common introduction was reviewed. Elmer Martens had spent an extended period of time at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, researching commentaries and came to the meeting with a proposal how the Believers Church Bible Commentary should be written. Unique in this proposal were three major elements: Explanatory Notes, Text in Biblical Context, and Text in the Life of the Church. Martens was assigned the task of writing the Jeremiah commentary. The Editorial Council reviewed guidelines for writers and assigned books to some writers to prepare samples for review. It was agreed the writing should be on the twelfth grade level for use across the church by pastors, Sunday school teachers, and small Bible study group leaders.

In 1983 there was more clarification of the guidelines for writers. In 1984 it was agreed that 250 to 325 pages was to be the goal for length of each volume. Throughout the process the Editorial Council agreed critical issues should be kept in the background.

In 1986, Jeremiah, the first commentary of the series, was published. In many ways this commentary became a guide for other writers in terms of layout, readability, essays, etc. Allen Guenther served as editor of this one volume. The Editorial Council stated, “this commentary series focuses attention on the canonical text rather than the pre-text of sources. . . . The exposition should proceed with nontechnical language rather than the scholarly shorthand.” It was noted Text in the Life of the Church should include pastoral concerns, history of interpretation, and application in the life of the church. “The whole of church history is to be taken into account, with focus on important moments in understanding the text, especially Anabaptist and discipleship understandings.” Other samples were assigned and/or reviewed, and writers were asked to write their assigned commentary.

In 1987 Paul M. Zehr was asked to chair the Editorial Council in the place of Harold Bauman who had ably served as chair from the beginning. In 1989 Howard H. Charles asked to be replaced as NT Editor due to health reasons and Willard M. Swartley was selected as NT Editor and served from 1989-2001.

In 1990 a representative from the Brethren Church joined the Editorial Council giving the project six denominations (Mennonite Church, Mennonite Brethren Church, General Conference Mennonite Church, Brethren in Christ Church, Church of the Brethren, and Brethren Church). In 1991 the Matthew commentary, written by Richard B. Gardner, was published.

Between 1991 and 2004 a total of 17 volumes were published (8 OT, 9 NT). Genesis was translated into Russian. With the publication of Exodus (2000), Ephesians (2002) and Romans (2004), the reading level of the commentaries moved higher. The Editorial Council agreed the reading level should move from grade twelve to first and second year college level. In 1992, through the goodness of a Showalter Fund grant, a special BCBC workshop for writers was held at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. Resource persons were Willard Swartley, Elmer Martens, Katie Funk Wiebe, C. J. Dyck, and S. David Garber. Attention was given to biblical interpretation issues, Text in Biblical Context, and Text in the Life of the Church as well as writing style. In 1996 and 1997, seminars were held across the church promoting the commentary series.

In 2002 Willard Swartley asked to be relieved of the NT editor work due to health concerns. Gordon Zerbe, from Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, was appointed NT Editor, and in 2006 Loren Johns of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary replaced him in this role. In 2003 Elmer Martens asked to be replaced, and Douglas B. Miller of Tabor College was appointed OT Editor. There has been some change in Editorial Council members in recent years. With the merger of the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church and the resultant change to Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA, there is now one representative from each of these two denominations. The names of the editors and Editorial Council members are listed in each volume of the BCBC that is published. At its 2004 meeting the Editorial Council and Herald Press honored Elmer Martens and Willard Swartley for their work on the commentary series over the years.

Reviews of the commentaries have been quite positive both from within the church and from the larger scholarly world. Herald Press also receives strong positive feedback from the church on the published volumes.

Paul M. Zehr  
11/04; rev. 11/06

# Summary Specifications

## Approach

The commentary is designed for Sunday school teachers and pastors, but is so to be written (1<sup>st</sup> year college reading level) that it will be useful to the general, reasonably-biblically-literate Christian public. The commentary is to evince knowledge of secondary literature with occasional references to such so that it can also be valuable to students in Bible colleges and/or religion majors at the university.

## Introduction

The introductory section should give some basic information (e.g., about author, the times, the audience, special features). The Editorial Council has noted the value of a section here on the “Message” or “Biblical Theology” of the book. As to composition and more technical matters, these may be mentioned in the introduction, but any more expansive treatment, if thought desirable, would best be treated in an essay which would appear at the end of the book. Discussion of historical-critical questions and sources will be kept to a minimum if noted at all.

## Full Outline

A full outline is usually published at the end of the book. Customarily the table of contents will build off the outline. The idea is to take a section, often a chapter and sometimes even more, discuss it, and conclude with the double entries Text in Biblical Context (TBC) and Text in the Life of the Church (TLC).

## Preview

In a few paragraphs the reader is to be given an overview of the material found in the unit under discussion. Preferably it would begin with a “hook” so the reader would from the first be alerted to topics that will be treated. The preview might already hint at the elaboration to be found in either or both TBC and TLC. The preview is to constitute about 10% of the discussion of the segment.

## Partial Outlines

Within a “unit,” the outline will appear in more detailed fashion. Be sure to follow the format as can be ascertained from any published volume.

## Explanatory Notes

Organizationally these should be in sync with the proposed outline. Verse-by-verse treatments are not desired. Rather, utilizing the proposed outline, writers are encouraged to proceed with discussions. The reader will be helped by (1) italicizing any words/phrases from the biblical text, and (2) references to the biblical text by verse numbering (e.g., vv. 2-3). Consider adding charts or line drawings. They not only break up pages and pages of print, but can assist the reader greatly. At least occasionally one could put here a comment from another scholar, or in discussion of variant views reference names (following the social science method of documentation).

### **Text in Biblical Context**

Here there should be 1-3 mini essays (with headings) which pick up motifs or themes within the passage and which show how these themes are expanded, or qualified elsewhere in the Bible, in the OT and in the NT. One may think of this section as a biblical theology, a memory jogger for the pastor via discussion and references.

### **Text in the Life of the Church**

This section is the insignia of the series and has received most favorable comment in reviews. Here one may show how through the centuries (including Anabaptist usage, but not only) the text has been employed or how the text addresses the present church (but without being too dated in the examples). There are Scripture indexes available to Menno Simon's writings and others. The mini-essays in this section should have a heading.

### **Essays**

Rather than repeatedly do an exposition of a theme (e.g., wrath of God) within the exposition, writers are requested to make a salient comment in the explanatory notes which can be supplemented by a fuller discussion in an essay to be placed at the end of the commentary in a Glossary and/or Essay section.

### **Selected Sources**

The idea here is to help readers with sources, especially with annotations, but perhaps also by dividing the sources into "Basic" or "Advanced." Note that this list, generally quite short, is in addition to a more or less full list of bibliography. For format, check published commentaries.

### **Indexes and Maps**

Indexes will be prepared after galley pages are available. If maps are needed, make suggestions of sources from which these might be taken.

E. A. Martens  
11/01; rev. 11/06

# Detailed Guidelines for Writers

## 1 Purpose

The series of commentaries on all the books of the Bible (though not separate volumes for each Bible book) is intended to assist pastors, teachers, and the informed layperson in understanding the message of the Bible. At the Commentary Workshop in Elkhart (1992) the following distinctives of these commentaries were itemized as follows:

- 1.1 They stand in the Anabaptist tradition. The series is to be a witness to the Anabaptist viewpoint in tenor as well as in “topics” (people of God, community, discipleship, peace, service/mission, etc.) but should not be parochially “in house” (see the Series Foreword).
- 1.2 They reflect a community hermeneutic. Input is given by lay readers, peer readers, and especially the Editorial Council which represents various denominations and points of view.
- 1.3 They place emphasis on theology.
- 1.4 Their level of writing is popular.
- 1.5 They are written for the church.

## 2 Sponsorship

- 2.1 The publisher of the series is Herald Press. From the first, an Editorial Council was organized to represent the participating denominations. For a list of current members from the six groups (Brethren Church, Church of the Brethren, Brethren in Christ Church, Mennonite Church USA, Mennonite Church Canada, and Mennonite Brethren Church) and the names of the current editors see a recent commentary.
- 2.2 The Editorial Council appoints writers and editors, and processes manuscripts en route to publication.

## 3 Appointment of Writers

- 3.1 The editors (OT and NT) take the lead in contacting potential writers who are invited to submit a vita.
- 3.2 The Editorial Council requests a sample of commentary writing from the candidate and then takes action on the appointment (requesting revisions, conditional acceptance, appointment). The sample should follow the guidelines set for the series, observe the respective lengths of the four sections, and reflect a writing style in accord with the target audience set for the project.
- 3.3 A “preliminary working bibliography” should be submitted along with the sample.

## **4 Logistical Matters for the Writers**

- 4.1 The writer relates to the editor, who offers feedback. It has been found salutary for the writer to submit the first draft in sections of 30-70 pages.
- 4.2 The writer takes responsibility to form a reference group of three persons. These are (1) a layperson (usually from his/her own congregation), (2) a complementary gender/cross-cultural person, and (3) a theological peer.
- 4.3 The writer submits portions of the writings to the first two reference group persons for feedback. (See the "Response Guide" in this handbook.) When the manuscript is nearing its first draft, the writer is asked to submit three names for a theological peer to the editor who in turn presents them to the Editorial Council. The Council appoints the theological peer who, for serving in this capacity, receives a complementary volume when it is published.
- 4.4 When the writer has incorporated the suggestions of the reference group and the editor, and a draft is satisfactorily completed, the author shall submit it to the editor in hard copy and electronically. The editor forwards the ms. to the Council. The Council may (1) reject it, (2) offer suggestions for improvement, or (3) move it forward toward publication. The Council's input along with that of the theological peer shall then be incorporated for a final draft.
- 4.5 Depending on the Council's instructions, the draft is processed by the editor, or again by the council before the ms. is submitted to the publisher.
- 4.6 The publisher issues a contract which has details about royalties (divided between writer 80% and editor 20%). Upon receipt of the ms. for publication the publisher reimburses the writer for expenses (paper, postage) up to an amount specified (currently \$100.00).

## **5 Specifications for the Writer**

- 5.1 Length. For a larger biblical book, the total length should fall between 300-400 printed pages (four manuscript pages equal approx. three printed pages). For volumes in which several books (and writers) are represented, the editor shall supply details about respective page lengths.
- 5.2 The ms. is written at first-year college comprehension level. The writing style should be bright and lively. Avoid a plodding mode. Bible references should be placed at the end of the sentence. Avoid sentences that begin, "In v. 4 Paul shows...."
- 5.3 The Scripture versions from which the writer may choose are the following: NRSV, NIV, TNIV.
- 5.4 The format for the volumes is as follows: Table of Contents, Series Foreword, Author's Preface, Abbreviations, Introduction, Commentary Proper, Detailed Outline of the Bible Book, Supplemental Essays, Maps, Appendixes, Bibliography of Works Cited, Selected Annotated Bibliography (approx. 10 books), Indexes, and an information piece about the Author.
- 5.5 Format for Scripture segments (parts of a Bible chapter, or several chapters, depending on the biblical book). The commentary may include an Overview for larger Scripture blocks. The essential commentary components for each "segment" are five: preview, outline, explanatory notes, text in biblical context (TBC), and text in the life of the church (TLC).

- 5.5.1 The preview (15% of space allocation) ideally hooks the reader on a note that will surface again in the TLC, and offers indications as to what kind of material will be found in the “segment,” explaining how this “segment” fits into the flow of the book. Items to include, as appropriate:
- theme of the unit or segment
  - literary type/form
  - historical setting
  - relation to context (preceding and following)
- 5.5.2 The Outline will be the skeleton for the Explanatory Notes and follows a defined format for the placing of the verse references (for examples see printed volumes).
- 5.5.3 The Explanatory Notes (50% of space allocation) should explain (1) items that are unclear to readers, (2) insights from word, rhetoric, historical, social, and/or syntactical analysis, etc. By Council policy matters of historical source criticism are not to be foregrounded; where appropriate, information can be given in supplemental essays. Charts here or elsewhere in the commentary are most desirable (almost mandatory).
- 5.5.4 The Text in Biblical Context section places the burden/message of the immediate text into the wider context of book, literary corpus, and canon. Brief essays should be given a heading; the aim is to point the way toward a biblical theology of the material.
- 5.5.5 The Text in the Life of the Church will also have one or more essays per “segment.” Here the writer can focus on one or more options: (1) how the text has been interpreted in the life of the Christian church over two millennia; (2) how the text has application to the current church (the global should be kept in mind, though understandably the remarks may be Western specific); and (3) an indication of springboards for preaching/teaching. How does the passage impact on the life of the church today? Moralizing detail or too local (temporal and cultural) applications should be avoided; strive for a theological tilt. TBC and TLC together might comprise 35% of space allocation.
- 5.5.6 Supplemental Essays (not to total more than ¼ of the book’s volume) are noted in the ms. by their titles in brackets, e.g., [*Wisdom; Judge*]. Writers are encouraged to draft these in the course of their commentary writing on a particular segment, rather than to write them all after the entire commentary is completed.

## 6 Technicalities

- 6.1 When wording from the biblical text is incorporated in the Explanatory Notes, these words should be italicized.
- 6.2 Words in Hebrew and Greek should be used sparingly and primarily if a lay reader could appreciate the reason for noting the transliteration. Transliteration should follow the *SBL Handbook* (also included in this handbook). Sometimes the publishing house style manual supersedes the *SBL Handbook*. Foreign words should follow their English translation and should be italicized. They are often placed in parenthesis.
- 6.3 Abbreviations for biblical books should follow the *SBL Handbook* (or when mandated, the publishing house style manual). Periods do not follow abbreviations, e.g., Eph for Ephesians.

- 6.4 When other Bible translations are referenced, their appropriate abbreviation must be given in parentheses, e.g., (NASB).
- 6.5 Footnotes are not part of the format. References to secondary sources are placed within the ms. following the sociology model, e.g., (Swartley, 1979: 21) or if only one entry by Swartley (Swartley, 21).
- 6.6 The name for God should be Lord, only seldom Yahweh. “Some use of YHWH if sparingly employed” is acceptable [Memo, 1992]. Conventional pronouns for God are acceptable if used sparingly, though at least one commentary was written without the use of such pronouns.
- 6.7 Human language should be gender inclusive.

## 7 Writing Hints

- 7.1 Work with your biblical book independent of other sources to begin with. The conventional wisdom is to “get a line on the book.” That is, either by approach or thematic emphasis let the commentary exhibit something distinctive about the book. You will not be able to say all that might be said; nor is there time or space to interact much with countervailing views, though some references to secondary sources are expected.
- 7.2 Write a first draft without trying to be perfect. Later, material will be added or deleted, but a first draft can set you on a momentum; you will need it to determine how much space you have. Most writers calculate by word count or page length how much space can be devoted to the segments.
- 7.3 After outlining the book, it is helpful to decide the extent of the blocks that will be treated as the larger unit, that is, a section with its own preview, notes, TBC and TLC.
- 7.4 Writing style is a major consideration. Keep the target audience in mind. You are not writing for fellow academics. This commentary is for the church, not the academy, though Christian colleges have selected BCBC for class texts. Pastors, not all of whom have seminary education, together with reasonably knowledgeable laypersons will be the audience. Evocative imagery, concise, crisp and persuasive readable English is not only desirable but necessary. A reader should be carried along, invited, so to speak, to read beyond their initial reason for consulting the commentary. For a helpful review see Katie Funk Wiebe’s paper, “How to Edit Your Own Writing” (Elkhart Workshop, 1992; available from editors).
- 7.5 To acquaint yourself with Anabaptist materials check *Mennonite Encyclopedia* V; C. J. Dyck, ed., *Introduction to Mennonite History*; Eldon T. Yoder and Monroe D. Hochstetler, *Biblical References in Anabaptist Writings* (Aylmer, Ont., LaGrange, Ind., Pathway Publishers, 1969); Ira D. Landis, *Scriptural Index to the Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 1981; Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers Church* (1963). See C. J. Dyck’s “Anabaptist 16c Bibliographical Resources” presented at the Elkhart Workshop in 1992. Scripture indexes to Anabaptist writings will be posted on the Herald Press website for your use.
- 7.6 Remember that your work is a service to God and to the church. Bathe your work in prayer.

Elmer A. Martens  
Gordon Zerbe 11/03; rev. 11/06

# The Writer, the Editor, and the Editorial Council

## 1 Writer

What does it mean for a writer to stand in the Believers Church community? The writer is within the Believers Church community if the Editorial Council says he or she is. How does the Editorial Council make this decision? The most crucial decision the Editorial Council makes is when it selects and approves a writer for the series. If a writer has been chosen and approved by the Editorial Council, the basic relationship is between the writer and the editor. This is basically a trust and confidence relationship which works best if trust is cultivated so that the writer responds to the editor's queries, based on the wisdom of the Editorial Council. There are four main points at which the Editorial Council speaks to the writer, all through the editor or Council chair.

- a. Making a decision on a writer (by consensus or by vote)
- b. Responding to a sample chapter
- c. Responding to the complete manuscript
- d. Making decisions on an edited manuscript (by consensus or vote)

At both the first and the last stage the Editorial Council decides for or against a proposed writer or manuscript. The rest of the process is one of consulting: fraternal, professional, and churchly respect.

## 2 Editor

How specific is a Believers Church theological understanding? It is the task of the editor to work closely alongside the writer to accomplish this perspective on the text. The purpose of the series is to provide a Believers Church reading of the Scriptures. These are the reader and market expectations—hence the editorial review process involving various denominational representatives and sponsorship, quite beyond what one might usually find in such a project. During the past several decades, Anabaptist interpretation has gained stature as a theological stream in the larger Christian world, much as one might respect Reformed, Lutheran, or Catholic interpretations.

Ironically, also during the past several decades when this project began, there is more pluralism among Mennonite, Brethren, and Brethren in Christ denominations than in the 1970s. This diversity is also part of the larger Evangelical world, hence the breadth of interpretations now published by Evangelical publishers such as Baker, Eerdmans, and InterVarsity, and the breadth of interpretation within the Evangelical Theological Society itself. As publishers, this diversity is our context. The Old Testament and New Testament editors nurture the commentary series to reflect Anabaptist interpretations, and it should not violate any of our denominational confessions of faith. But within that range, to what extent should our commentaries reflect the current diversity of Anabaptist interpretations today?

### **3 Editorial Council**

What is the appropriate balance of the individual writer and the churches' voice? BCBC "represent a hermeneutical community's efforts in interpreting the biblical text, as led by the Spirit." This in itself is a part of the distinction of the Believers Churches. Yet, Anabaptist writers also have distinct voices within this community. John Howard Yoder probably did more than any other writer or scholar in popularizing the term "hermeneutical community," and Yoder would send drafts of his writings to many people for testing. Yet, Yoder's writing and interpretation also had a singular tone and voice, quite different from the writing of a confession of faith or editorial in which one gives up claims to individual voice.

The Editorial Council provides the churches' voice in the selection of the writer, responding to sample chapters, responding to the entire manuscript, and final approval or disapproval of the entire manuscript. It has the ultimate and most important decisions, but it respects the role of the writer and the editor, and may not agree with all parts of the manuscript. The Editorial Council does not attempt to write, edit, or rewrite the manuscript, however much an individual Council member may agree or disagree with some aspects of the manuscript. It gives counsel to the editor and issues queries at appropriate times, but ultimately approves or disapproves a manuscript with the unique voice of the Anabaptist writer. Is this giving the appropriate balance to the writer and community voice?

Levi Miller  
11/04; rev. 11/06

# **Memo of Understanding for BCBC Editors**

## **A Process of Editorial Responsibility Vis á Vis Writers**

1. Editor invites specific people to consider writing for the series and solicits their interest in the project.
2. If the person expresses interest, he/she is invited to submit a vita and statement of interest which the editor in turn presents to the Editorial Council.
3. The Council takes action to invite a sample from a writer/candidate.
4. The sample to be submitted is to follow the guidelines set by the Editorial Council regarding respective lengths of the four major sections and to reflect a writing style in accord with the target audience set for the project. Further, in the June 1992 meeting of the Editorial Council, the Council requested that a “preliminary working bibliography” for the commentary be submitted along with the sample.
5. The sample may be submitted to the editor for initial feedback before submission to the Council. When submitting to the Council, the Council responds by either accepting, turning it down, or asking for revisions, which implies conditional acceptance.
6. The Chair of the Council informs the writer of the decision and actions taken by the Council.
7. The editor follows up the Council Chair’s letter to the writer-candidate with a letter that conveys specific points of counsel for further work on the sample and larger manuscript.
8. The writer takes responsibility to get three consultants for the project. These are (1) a layperson (often from his/her own congregation), (2) a complementary gender/cross-cultural person, and (3) a theological peer. The candidate is asked to submit three names for a theological peer to the editor who in turn presents them to the Council. The Council acts to appoint the theological peer, and the editor informs such persons of the same. Persons serving in this capacity shall receive a complementary copy of the volume when it is published.
9. During the process of writing the commentary, the writer is asked to submit another portion of work (60 to 70 pages) to the editor at least once—perhaps twice—before the first draft is completed. The same submissions are to go to the consultants as well, in order to get their feedback.

10. When the manuscript is complete, the writer submits a complete written copy and an electronic copy to the editor. The editor sends a written copy and an electronic copy to the Herald Press editor of the project. Copies of the manuscript are sent to the various members of the Council.
11. The Editorial Council takes action to approve the manuscript, or to call for specific revisions (which implies acceptance of the manuscript as such).
12. A letter from the Chair of the Council, Paul M. Zehr, is sent to the writer informing him/her of the Editorial Council's decision.
13. The editor also writes to the writer to convey the specific content of the feedback to the manuscript received during the Editorial Council's deliberations.
14. The next submission of the manuscript is to the editor who then determines whether additional work is to be done or whether it can be sent to Herald Press for the page proof stage.
15. Herald Press sends page proofs to the writer who writes on it and then sends it to the editor for final checking and revisions. The editor then sends the proofs to Herald Press.
16. During this period of final preparation of the manuscript, Herald Press sends a "Publishing Contract" to be signed by both the writer and the editor.

Rev. 11/06

# Style Matters and Transliteration

Writers of the Believers Church Bible Commentary should have the following easily available:

1. The *Chicago Manual of Style* (University of Chicago Press) or a more popular presentation of it such as Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (University of Chicago Press).
2. The Mennonite Publishing House Supplement to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.
3. *The SBL Handbook of Style* (Hendrickson).

## Transliteration of Biblical Languages

The “academic style” of transliteration is to be used (*SBL Handbook*, pp. 26-27, 29). For ease of use, the transliteration equivalents are reproduced below.

### Hebrew

**Greek**

## RESPONSE GUIDE FOR READER-CONSULTANT BELIEVERS CHURCH BIBLE COMMENTARY

The following questions are designed to help you evaluate the commentary materials on aspects of special interest to both author and editor. Please be frank in your response. Add whatever comments are important to you in further clarifying your evaluation of the script. Thank you for your help.

	No	Uncertain	Yes		
<b>A. <u>General Readability</u></b>					
1. Vocabulary is understandable to students of early college: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5
2. Sentences are concise and direct: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5
3. Paragraphs are the proper length: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5
4. Style is fresh and engaging: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5
5. Flow of thought is clear: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5
<b>B. <u>Specific Segments</u></b>					
1. Preview (a) Stimulates interest in what is to follow: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5
(b) Provides helpful orientation to the unit: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5

	No	Uncertain	Yes		
2. Explanatory Notes					
(a) Discussion focuses on significant matters: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5
(b) Level of technicality is about right: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5
3. Text in Biblical content					
(a) Sustains the reader's interest in a good way: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5
(b) Enlarges understanding of the passage by showing how it is related to other parts of the Bible: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5
4. Text in the life of the church					
(a) Indicates how the text has or may function in shaping the belief or the conduct of God's people: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5
(b) Balance between historical and contemporary references is good: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5

### Summary

1. In what ways is the Anabaptist perspective evident?
2. What problems, if any, are there with the general interpretive stance of the author?
3. What suggestions for improvement do you have?
4. Is this the sort of commentary you would recommend to your friends for the study or teaching of this book of the Bible?

# Appendix: Visionary Document, 1983

## Guidelines for Writers of the Believers Church Bible Commentary

### 1. Rationale

As a people of the Bible, members of the Believers Church claim that our distinctive understanding of Christian faith and life flows from the Scriptures. Consequently a Bible commentary within this tradition will move to support this claim.

Within the Believers Church tradition the Church is envisioned as a voluntary community of love. It consists of persons claimed by Christ's love who commit themselves to follow their Master in worship and discipleship, in fellowship and nurture, in separation from the world and the obedient response to "go into all the world and make disciples of all nations..."

The ethical vision of the Believers Church grows out of an active love. It includes sharing possessions to meet the needs of others. It assumes a readiness to serve. It places high value on human life. It is rooted in the reconciling work of God and issues in the call to be a reconciling people.

The Believers Church perspective on the Bible obligates every Christian to study the Scriptures for the purpose of meeting God in them and to discover and practice the will of God. Such study will be individual and corporate. Insights are shared with the body, resulting in obedience to the truth. The Christian searches the Scriptures aware that God's truth can not be plumbed. Consequently, he brings to the Bible an attitude of expectation and openness. The commentary, therefore, is to encourage further reflection and study. This will occur through style, hints of fruitful issues to pursue and explicit means such as questions. The commentary shall generate interest, inquisitiveness and excitement in further understanding and application of the biblical message.

The rationale for the proposed commentary springs from these contributions and perspectives of the Believers Church regarding the Church and its mission, ethics, and the Scriptures.

Therefore the purpose of the Believers Church Bible Commentary is to:

- 1.1 Clarify and strengthen the Believers Church understanding of its biblical foundation.
- 1.2 Pass on the heritage of faith to succeeding generations. The production of such a commentary is timely inasmuch as there are now sufficient mature Bible teachers among us to complete the task.
- 1.3 Share the Believers Church perspectives on the essential teachings of Scripture and the resultant faith-responses with the wider church. While the intention is not to search the Scriptures for themes that are characteristic of the Believers Church tradition, there is a felt need to highlight themes which are central yet do not receive sufficient or balanced treatment in the commentaries of other Christian traditions.

These include the believers concept of the people of God, the peace/reconciliation theme and the call to missions/service as an integral part of the Scriptures.

## 2. Target Readership

The primary users of this commentary will be leaders and teachers of Believers Church congregations in North America. This would include, for example, pastors (trained and untrained), teachers of Sunday school classes, Bible study group leaders, and persons educated in professional areas other than theology and Bible.

We envision this commentary to be written for any person or group with serious interest in Bible study. It shall provide resource material which does not assume highly technical or scholarly Bible study skills on the part of the reader.

The commentary should, therefore, be written at a high school senior or college freshman reading level. If written effectively for this readership, we envision that it will also be used:

- 2.1 As a high school and college curriculum resource;
- 2.2 As resource material for youth and adult Christian education classes;
- 2.3 By Bible Institute students;
- 2.4 By individuals who want to do serious private Bible study;
- 2.5 By international leaders of the Believers Church tradition; and
- 2.6 By persons interested in the foundations of faith and interpretive approach of the Believers Church.

## 3. Content

The Believers Church commentary is to be an independent work. It will not replace curriculum or Bible study guides which may be more dated. It will place the weight on exposition rather than applications though it will include the latter.

The exposition of this commentary will be by pericopes, or groups of pericopes rather than in a verse-by-verse form. While the writers are expected to bring the full gamut of expository skills to the analysis of the text, the interest lies in the content in its present mode rather than with the prehistory of the text, putative sources, form-critical structures or analyses. The biblical criticisms should not be in the foreground, but they are appropriate inasmuch as they illuminate the meaning of the text and build faith.

The content will consist of six types of comments:

- 3.1 Illumination of Hebrew/Greek texts. Use of transliterations will be kept to an absolute minimum.
- 3.2 Historical/cultural background;
- 3.3 The literary structure of material as this is significant for interpretation;
- 3.4 Theological, sociological, ecclesiological, and ethical interpretation;
- 3.5 The use of, bearing/interpretation of OT texts in the NT and of the meaning of the larger contexts of the pericopes or units of text; and
- 3.6 Practical – homiletical – devotional dimensions.

The major emphasis of this project shall be on 3.4. Points 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.5 should be included whenever they contribute to the type of comment listed under 3.4. The practical – homiletical – devotional dimensions (3.6) should be included as the text elicits them. Care must be taken not to “date” the commentary with the comments regarding application.

#### 4. Format

The following is the proposed structure for the commentary on each book (longer books would be treated alone in a commentary; shorter books would be grouped to create a volume of about 250-300 pages).

##### 4.1 Text/Pericope Analysis

###### 4.1.1 Preview. Summary of the text section

- Identifies general theme, literary type, and historical context
- Calls attention to the agenda behind the text
- Summary of how the text is handled (bird’s eye view of the unit)
- Calls attention to the theological significance of the unit.

###### 4.1.2 Outline

- Based on structural composition of the text possibly done with a chart

###### 4.1.3 Explanatory notes

- archeological, historical, social, linguistic
- simple line drawings/charts

###### 4.1.4 Biblical Context

- The writer summarizes the theological message and relates it to its increasingly larger contexts (rest of book, OT/NT, Bible)

###### 4.1.5 Context in life

- How does the text touch contemporary life?
- Care needs to be taken not to limit the application to western society or to the 1980s.

##### 4.2 Excurses/Summaries

These are mini-essays and word studies which include information, perspectives, terminology or theological concepts as they are distinctively treated in the particular book under study. This is material *common* or *essential* to the whole book.

It was thought that this could comprise 1/3 to 1/4 of the commentary volume.

##### 4.3 Glossary

##### 4.4 Selected Bibliography

The bibliographic data would appear in two categories or levels

4.4.1 Bibliographic information for works cited in the text. The text will contain, where necessary, footnotes in the social science mode of reference (e.g., Coggins, 34)

4.4.2 An annotated bibliography in which the level of difficulty/technical character of the book is noted. This shall consist of a limited number of titles which are currently in print.

## 4.5 Indexes

4.5.1 of Scripture - prepared by writer

4.5.2 of topics - prepared by writer

## 4.6 Maps (where applicable)

The biblical text will not be printed in the commentary. Instead, the Common Introduction will identify the three versions (NRSV, NIV, NASB) which have been used in a comparative basis. Each writer will be asked to identify one of these as primary in his exposition. He will choose one but work with an eye to the other two. Writers may make their own translations where the exposition of the text demands it.

## 5. Editorial Perspectives

5.1 Presupposition 1: The role of the Believers Church commentary is to aid the interpreting process, not to provide the final word in understanding Scripture.

The content is not to be overly prescriptive or creedal. But this does not exclude the writer's taking and stating his position or interpretation.

The style shall be dialogical in character acknowledging the diversity of viewpoint and emphasis within the canon and in the church, past and present. A polarizing style shall be avoided.

The context and style shall reflect the pilgrim nature of God's people. We avoid dogmatism and rigidity and encourage openness while holding firm convictions.

5.2 Presupposition 2: The approach of a Believers Church commentary shall recognize the perspectives of the Believers Church tradition as fruitful but not limiting to the interpretive process.

The work shall stand within the Believers Church tradition and recognize a distinctive contribution of this tradition to the understanding and use of Scripture. The compilation of all biblical references in Dirk Philips, Menno Simons, and *Martyr's Mirror* by Yoder-Hochstaetter (*Biblical References in Anabaptist Writing*, Aylmer, Ont: Pathway Publ.) is a useful source.

Theological and hermeneutical emphases of this tradition pertinent to the commentary project are contained in publications such as: *Biblical Interpretation in the Life of the Church*, *Affirming Our Faith in Word and Deed*, and *The Authority of Scripture*.

5.3 Presupposition 3: The interpretative process occurs through the work of the Holy Spirit and within a hermeneutical community.

In the Believers Church tradition the exegete works in concert with others – his or her exegetical peers as well as those for whom the interpretation is intended. This involves, at the very least, a testing process.

Each writer will work with a group or sampling of informal consultants. The editors will suggest the types of consultants which could profitably be used. These would include representatives of the target readership, someone from another culture and senior churchmen.

A second level/stage of consultants will be the writer's peers who critically test the completed MS for readability, breadth, inclusiveness, thoroughness and felicity in interpretation, and consistency with the stated objectives of the commentary.

5.4 Presupposition 4: The Scriptures are divinely inspired and the authoritative testimony of God's revelation, displayed most perfectly in the person, ministry and teachings of Jesus Christ.

## 6. Writers

Writers for the commentaries shall be selected by the Editorial Council. Most writers shall be selected from the larger Believers Church, with a majority from North America.

Criteria used for selection of writers:

- 6.1 Ability to work on all six types of comment (Sec. 3)
- 6.2 Support of the theological perspectives described above (Secs. 1, 5) and demonstrated commitment to the Believers Church theological perspectives in relationship to the scholarly thought in the area of his/her commentary assignment.
- 6.3 Involvement in congregational life; willingness to write for theologically untrained church leaders; and commitment to serve congregations in biblical interpretation.
- 6.4 Ability to write clearly and simply and to communicate scholarly insights through nontechnical concepts, vocabulary, and style.
- 6.5 Maturity in Christian faith and concern for the edification of the body of Christ.

(Prepared in 1982, third draft revised and accepted in 1983)