

**BELIEVERS CHURCH BIBLE
COMMENTARY**

WRITERS HANDBOOK



Believers Church Bible Commentary Editorial Council

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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. No printed biblical text has been provided so that readers might continue to use the translation with which they are most familiar. The writers of the series use the *New Revised Standard Version* and the *New International Version* 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 in "The Text in Biblical Context" and "The Text in the Life of the Church." 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 term *believers church* has been used in the past one hundred years or so in reference to sixteenth-century Anabaptists and related groups such as those who sponsor this commentary series: Mennonite Church USA, Mennonite Church Canada, Mennonite Brethren Church, Brethren Church, Brethren in Christ Church, and Church of the Brethren. As used for this series, *believers church* represents those ecclesiological traditions that hold to beliefs and practices such as believers baptism, commitment to the Rule of Christ in Matthew 18:15-20 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 interacts with archaeology and biblical scholarship while seeking to be faithful to the Scriptures. 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 basic presuppositions about Christ, the church and its mission, God and history, human nature, the Christian life, and other doctrines do shape a writer's interpretation of Scripture. Thus this series, like all other commentaries, stands within a specific stream of 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, though 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 Old Testament Editor, a New Testament 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 sixty 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 about how the Believers Church Bible Commentary should be written. Unique to 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 target 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 to 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 generosity of a Schowalter Foundation 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. In 2006, the Council celebrated the series’ twentieth volume (10 from each testament) and renewed its commitment to bring the entire project to completion.

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; 9/10

Philosophy, Structure, and Relationships of the BCBC Project

1. Rationale and Purpose

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. Christians search the Scriptures aware that God's truth cannot be plumbed. Consequently, they bring to the Bible an attitude of expectation and openness. The commentary, therefore, is to encourage further reflection and study. This will occur implicitly, for example, through narratives of faithful living and raising questions, and more explicitly through such means as suggestions for fruitful issues to pursue. The commentary is intended to generate interest, inquisitiveness, and excitement toward 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.

- 1.1 Therefore the purpose of the Believers Church Bible Commentary is to:
 - 1.1.1 Clarify and strengthen the believers church understanding of its biblical foundation.
 - 1.1.2 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.
 - 1.1.3 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 that 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 and reconciliation theme, and the call to mission and service as an integral part of the Scriptures ("Guidelines," 3rd revision, 1983).

- 1.2 At the commentary workshop in Elkhart (1992) the following distinctives of these commentaries were named:
 - 1.2.1 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).
 - 1.2.2 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.
 - 1.2.3 They place emphasis on theology.
 - 1.2.4 Their level of writing is popular.
 - 1.2.5 They are written for the church.

2. Target Readership

The commentary should be written at a college freshman reading level. The expected primary users of this commentary are:

- 2.1 Leaders and teachers of believers church congregations in North America. This would include, for example, pastors, teachers of Sunday school classes, Bible study group leaders, and persons educated in professional areas other than theology and Bible.
- 2.2 Any person or group with serious interest in Bible study. It shall provide resource material that does not assume highly technical or scholarly Bible study skills on the part of the reader.
- 2.3 College students and perhaps also those in senior high school.
- 2.4 Youth and adult Christian education classes.
- 2.5 Bible institute students.
- 2.6 International leaders of churches in the believers church tradition.
- 2.7 Persons interested in the foundations of faith and interpretive approach of the believers church.

3. Concept

- 3.1 Presupposition 1: The role of the Believers Church Bible Commentary is to aid the interpreting process, not to provide the final word in understanding Scripture.

The content is not to be overtly prescriptive or creedal. But this does not exclude the Writer’s taking and stating his or her 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 must be avoided. The context and style shall reflect the pilgrim nature of God’s people. We wish to avoid dogmatism and rigidity and encourage openness while holding firm convictions.

The BCBC is to be an independent work. It will not replace curriculum or Bible study guides which may quickly become dated. It will place the weight on exposition rather than application, 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 focus rests on the content in its present mode rather than with the prehistory of the text, putative sources, or form-critical structures or analyses. Critical methodologies 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:

- 3.1.1 Theological, sociological, ecclesiological, and ethical interpretation.
- 3.1.2 Illumination of Hebrew and Greek texts. Transliterations will be kept to a minimum.
- 3.1.3 Historical and cultural backgrounds.
- 3.1.4 The literary structure of the material as this is significant for interpretation.
- 3.1.5 The use and interpretation of OT texts in the NT and the meaning of the larger contexts of the pericopes or units of text.
- 3.1.6 Practical, homiletical, and devotional dimensions.

The major emphasis of this project shall be on the first. The subsequent five points should be included whenever they contribute to the type of comment listed under the first. The commentary is to evince knowledge of secondary literature with occasional references to such. The practical, homiletical, and devotional dimensions (3.1.6) should be included as the text elicits them. Care must be taken not to date the commentary with the comments regarding application.

- 3.2 Presupposition 2: The approach of a commentary shall recognize the perspectives of the believers church tradition as fruitful but not limiting in the interpretive process.

The work shall stand within the believers church tradition and recognize distinctive contributions of this tradition to the understanding and use of Scripture. The compilation of all biblical references in Dirk Philips, Menno Simons, and *Martyrs Mirror* by Yoder-Hochstetler (*Biblical References in Anabaptist Writing*, Aylmer, Ont: Pathway Publ.) is a useful source, as are the Scripture indexes contained within the Radical Reformation series volumes.

- 3.3 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 church leaders.

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

- 3.4 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.

4. The Commentary Writer

The most crucial decision the Editorial Council makes is when it selects and approves a Writer for the series. The Editors (OT and NT) take the lead in contacting potential Writers and inviting them to submit a vita. Writers are then selected by the Editorial Council. It is expected that most Writers will be chosen from among the believers church, with a majority from North America. The criteria for choosing a Writer are as follows:

- 4.1 Ability to work on all six types of comment (Sec. 3.1)
- 4.2 Support of the theological perspectives described above (Secs. 1 and 3) and demonstrated commitment to the believers church theological perspectives in relationship to the scholarly thought in the area of his or her commentary assignment.
- 4.3 Involvement in congregational life; willingness to write for theologically untrained church leaders; and commitment to serve congregations in biblical interpretation.
- 4.4 Ability to write clearly and simply and to communicate scholarly insights through nontechnical concepts, vocabulary, and style.
- 4.5 Maturity in Christian faith and concern for the edification of the body of Christ.

If a Writer has been identified and tentatively approved by the Editorial Council, the 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, conform to the respective lengths of the four sections, and reflect a writing style in accord with the target audience set for the project. A "preliminary working bibliography" should be submitted along with the sample.

At all times, the primary relationship is between the Writer and the Editor. This is basically a trust and confidence relationship that 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.

5. The Editors

It is the task of the OT and NT Editors to work closely alongside the Writer to accomplish a believers church theological 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 late twentieth century, Anabaptist interpretation gained stature as a theological stream in the larger Christian world, much as one might respect Reformed, Lutheran, or Catholic interpretations.

In the decades since this project began, pluralism has increased among the sponsoring denominations. This diversity also characterizes 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, the commentaries seek to reflect and speak to the current diversities in today's church without being captive to them.

6. The Editorial Council

From the first, an Editorial Council was organized to represent the participating denominations, now Brethren Church, Church of the Brethren, Brethren in Christ Church, Mennonite Church USA, Mennonite Church Canada, and Mennonite Brethren Church. The Editorial Council appoints Writers and Editors and processes manuscripts en route to publication. The publisher of the series is Herald Press. A representative of the Press participates regularly in conversation with the Council.

The Council monitors the appropriate balance between the individual Writer and the churches' voice. BCBC commentaries "represent a hermeneutical community's efforts in interpreting the biblical text, as led by the Spirit" (part of the original series foreword). This in itself is a part of the distinction of the believers churches. 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. It seeks an appropriate balance between the voices of the Writer and the community.

Taken from the original “Guidelines” for the BCBC project (1982, 3d revision 1983) with contributions by Elmer Martens, Gordon Zerbe, and Levi Miller 11/01; 11/03; 11/04; 11/06; 9/10

Guidelines for BCBC Editors and the Editorial Council

1. The Editor invites specific people to consider writing for the series and solicits their interest in the project.
2. If the person expresses interest, he or 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. A “preliminary working bibliography” for the commentary should 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 accepting it rejecting it, 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 identify 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. Criteria for the peer reader are as follows: (a) good scholar (who has published in the area); (b) connected to the church; and (c) if not a member of a BCBC partner denomination, should be a good conversation partner with the Anabaptist tradition. The candidate is 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 complimentary copy of the volume when it is published.
9. During the process of writing the commentary, the Writer is 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 is sent to the Writer informing him or 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 and to the Editor, both of whom make comments and send them to the Press for checking and revisions. The details are finalized to the satisfaction of the Writer and the 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; 9/10

Guidelines for BCBC Writers

1. Logistical Matters

- 1.1 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 to 70 pages.
- 1.2 The Writer takes responsibility to identify a reference group of three persons. These are: (1) a layperson (usually from his or her own congregation), (2) a complementary gender/cross-cultural person, and (3) a theological peer. Criteria for the peer reader are as follows: (a) good scholar (who has published in the area); (b) connected to the church; and (c) if not a member of a BCBC partner denomination, should be a good conversation partner with the Anabaptist tradition. When the manuscript is nearing completion of its first draft, the Writer proposes three peer candidates to the Editor, who brings them to the Council who makes the selection of the peer who, for serving in this capacity, receives a complimentary volume when it is published.
- 1.3 The Writer submits portions of the writings to the reference group for feedback. (See the “Response Guide” in this handbook.)
- 1.4 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 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 (mediated by the Editor) along with that of the theological peer shall then be incorporated for a final draft.
- 1.5 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.
- 1.6 The publisher issues a contract with 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).

2. Specifications for the Book

- 2.1 Length. Longer biblical books are treated alone; shorter books are grouped to create a volume. In either case, the resulting published book should typically fall between 300 and 500 pages. A full published page contains approximately 450 words. Dividing the number of words in a complete manuscript by 400 yields a rough estimate of the number of published pages prior to the indexes. For volumes in which several biblical books (and perhaps Writers) are represented, the Editor shall supply details about respective page lengths.
- 2.2 The ms. is written at first-year college comprehension level. The writing style should be bright and lively rather than plodding. Bible references should be placed at the end of the sentence. Avoid sentences that begin, “In v. 4 Paul shows”

- 2.3 The Scripture versions which the Writer should track are the following: NRSV, NIV, and others (sparingly) as considered significant. The biblical text will not be printed in the commentary. The Introduction will identify the versions that have been used on a comparative basis. Each Writer will be asked to identify one of these as primary in the exposition. He or she will choose one but will also track the other. Writers may make their own translations where the exposition of the text demands it.
- 2.4 The format for the volumes is as follows: Title Page, Dedication Page, Abbreviations, Table of Contents, Series Foreword, Author's Preface, Introduction, Commentary Proper, Detailed Outline of the Bible Book(s), Supplemental Essays, Maps, Appendixes, Bibliography of Works Cited, Selected Annotated Bibliography (approx. 10 books), Index of Ancient Sources, and an information piece about the Author.
- 2.5 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. Composition and more technical matters may be mentioned in the Introduction, but any more expansive treatment, if thought desirable, would best be treated in an essay at the end of the book. Discussion of historical-critical questions and sources will be kept to a minimum if noted at all.
- 2.6 Detailed Outline. A full outline is published at the end of the book. Customarily the table of contents will build off the outline.
- 2.7 Scripture Segments (parts of a Bible chapter, or several chapters, depending on the biblical book). The commentary should 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).
- 2.7.1 Preview (10-15% of space allocation). 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 in the TBC and/or TLC. It 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:
- a "hook" of theme or themes
 - an overview of themes of the segment
 - statement of literary type/form
 - statement of historical setting
 - the relationship of the section to its context (preceding and following)
- 2.7.2 The Outline serves as the skeleton for the Explanatory Notes and follows a defined format for the placing of the verse references (for examples see printed volumes).
- 2.7.3 The Explanatory Notes (50% of space allocation) should explain (1) items that are unclear to readers, (2) insights from word, rhetorical, historical, archaeological, social, and/or syntactical analysis, etc. Matters of historical source criticism are not to be foregrounded; where

appropriate, information can be given in supplemental essays. 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) verse references to the biblical text (e.g., vv. 2-3). Adding charts or line drawings not only break up pages and pages of print, but also 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).

- 2.7.4 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. Here there should be one to three mini-essays (with headings) that pick up motifs or themes within the passage and that show how these themes are expanded or qualified elsewhere in the Bible, whether OT or NT. One may think of this section as an intertextual biblical theology, a memory jogger for the pastor/reader via discussion and references.
- 2.7.5 The Text in the Life of the Church section is the insignia of the series and has received favorable comment in reviews. As with TBC, this section has one or more essays per “segment,” each with a heading. Here the Writer can focus on (1) how the text has been interpreted in the life of the Christian church over two millennia (including Anabaptist usage, but not limited to this); and (2) how the text might apply to the current church (without examples that might quickly become dated); the global context should be kept in mind. The Writer should suggest springboards for preaching and/or teaching. Moralizing detail or too local (temporal and cultural) applications should be avoided. The commentary should be more theological than historical or moralistic. TBC and TLC together might comprise 35% of space allocation. There are Scripture indexes available to sixteenth-century Anabaptist writings on the Herald Press website.
- 2.8 Supplemental Essays (not to total more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of the book’s volume) are noted in the ms. by their titles in brackets, e.g., [*Wisdom, p. 123*]. Rather than repeatedly exploring a common theme (e.g., wrath of God) within the exposition, Writers should note it briefly in the Explanatory Notes while referring the reader to a fuller discussion in an essay. Writers should 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.
- 2.9 Bibliography. This section compiles a complete list of all sources cited in the commentary. For format, check published commentaries and the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition.
- 2.10 Selected Resources are to help readers with sources, especially by including annotations, optionally dividing the section into “Basic” and “Advanced.” This short list (no more than ten items) is in addition to the Bibliography. For format, check published commentaries.

- 2.11 Two maps from the putative time of the text's composition, a map of Palestine and a map of the ancient Near East (OT) or Mediterranean (NT) are typically prepared. The author should suggest sources from which these might be taken (including previously published BCBC commentaries).
- 2.12 An index of ancient sources will be prepared by the Press after galley pages are available.

3. Writing Hints

- 3.1 Initially work with your biblical book independent of other sources. The conventional wisdom is to “get a line on the book.” 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; there is neither time nor space to interact much with countervailing views, though some references to secondary sources are expected.
- 3.2 Write a first draft without trying to be perfect. Later, material will be added or deleted, but a first draft can establish 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.
- 3.3 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, Outline, Explanatory Notes, TBC, and TLC.
- 3.4 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 and readable English that is concise, crisp, and persuasive 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 the Editors).
- 3.5 To acquaint yourself with Anabaptist materials check the *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*; 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; and 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 sixteenth-century Anabaptist writings are posted on the Herald Press website.
- 3.6 Remember that your work is a service to God and to the church. Bathe your work in prayer.

4. Style Matters

- 4.1 Writers of the Believers Church Bible Commentary should have the following easily available:
 - 4.1.1 *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).
 - 4.1.2 The Mennonite Publishing House Supplement to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.
 - 4.1.3 *The SBL Handbook of Style* (Hendrickson).
- 4.2 Quotation from the biblical text should be italicized. This is true for all translations of the biblical book to which the commentary is devoted, whether the author's translation (AT), the primary English versions (NRSV, NIV), a "literal" translation (lit. *vapor*), or another version (e.g., NASB).
- 4.3 Quotations from portions of the Bible other than the biblical book of focus should be placed in quotation marks or (if more than four lines) in block indentation.
- 4.4 The primary translation used in the commentary (typically NRSV or NIV) should be identified in the preface, but not throughout the commentary.
- 4.5 Abbreviations for biblical books should follow the publishing house style manual. Periods do not follow abbreviations (e.g., Eph for Ephesians).
- 4.6 When other Bible translations are referenced, their appropriate abbreviation is given in parentheses. Examples: Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse (Rom 12:14 NASB); In Romans 12:14, Paul says, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (NASB).
- 4.7 Citations should be in-text rather than in footnotes. These should be placed toward the end of a sentence. Note the following examples:
 - 4.7.1 (Swartley 1979: 21). Or if only one entry by Swartley (Swartley: 21). A colon precedes the page number. The author's last name and year of publication are not to be separated by a comma.
 - 4.7.2 (*ANET* 595; *MBCF* 68-68; *HWB* 383), items listed by abbreviation.
 - 4.7.3 (*TDNT* 12:22) vol. + page no. The page number is included because entries are not in alphabetical order.
 - 4.7.4 (BDAG). No page number because entries are in alphabetical order; no italics because abbreviations represent authors' names.
- 4.8 References to essays should be indicated in square brackets, with the brackets and the references italicized, e.g., [*Authorship, p. 123*].
- 4.9 References to other parts of the commentary, such as the introduction, a TLC or a TBC section, should be in parentheses and not italicized. The word "see" used in references should not be in italics. It should be enclosed in parentheses, e.g., (see "Author and Audience" in the Introduction).
- 4.10 Counting occurrences, e.g., five times, thirty-one times, should be spelled out except when used in a chart.
- 4.11 The name for God should be Lord, only seldom Yahweh. Some use of YHWH, if sparingly employed, is acceptable. LORD (SMALL CAPS), except in biblical quotations, should be used only rarely. Conventional (masculine) pronouns for God are acceptable if used sparingly.

- 4.12 For dates, BC and AD are used (without periods) rather than BCE and CE.
- 4.13 Human language should be gender inclusive.
- 4.14 Words in Hebrew and Greek should be used sparingly and primarily if a lay reader could appreciate the reason for noting the transliteration. Foreign words should follow their English translation and should be italicized. They are often placed in parentheses.
- 4.15 For Hebrew and Aramaic, the “academic style” of transliteration is to be used for consonants and the “general purpose style” for vowels. For Greek, the “general purpose style” should be used for both consonants and vowels (*SBL Handbook*, pp. 26-29). For ease of use, the transliteration equivalents are reproduced below.

Hebrew

Consonants

א	<i>ʾālep</i>	כּ		מ, ם	<i>mēm</i>	<i>m</i>
ב	<i>bêt</i>	כ	<i>b</i>	נ, ן	<i>nûn</i>	<i>n</i>
ג	<i>gîmel</i>	ג	<i>g</i>	ס	<i>sāmek</i>	<i>s</i>
ד	<i>dālet</i>	ד	<i>d</i>	ע	<i>ʿayin</i>	<i>ʿ</i>
ה	<i>hê</i>	ה	<i>h</i>	פ, ף	<i>pê</i>	<i>p</i>
ו	<i>wāw</i>	ו	<i>w</i>	צ, ץ	<i>ṣādê</i>	<i>ṣ</i>
ז	<i>zayin</i>	ז	<i>z</i>	ק	<i>qôp</i>	<i>q</i>
ח	<i>hêt</i>	ח	<i>ḥ</i>	ר	<i>rêš</i>	<i>r</i>
ט	<i>têt</i>	ט	<i>ṭ</i>	שׁ	<i>śîn</i>	<i>ś</i>
י	<i>yôd</i>	י	<i>y</i>	שׂ	<i>šîn</i>	<i>š</i>
כּ, ן	<i>kāp</i>	כ	<i>k</i>	ת	<i>tāw</i>	<i>t</i>
ל	<i>lāmed</i>	ל	<i>l</i>			

Vowels

ֿ	<i>patakh</i>	<i>a</i>	יְ	<i>hireq yod</i>	<i>i</i>
ֿ	<i>furtive patakh</i>	<i>a</i>	ֿ	<i>qamets khatuf</i>	<i>o</i>
ֿ	<i>qamets</i>	<i>a</i>	ֿ	<i>holem</i>	<i>o</i>
ֿ	<i>final qamets he</i>	<i>ah</i>	ֿ	<i>full holem</i>	<i>o</i>
ֿ	<i>segol</i>	<i>e</i>	ֿ	<i>short qibbutz</i>	<i>u</i>
ֿ	<i>tsere</i>	<i>e</i>	ֿ	<i>long qibbutz</i>	<i>u</i>
ֿ	<i>tsere yod</i>	<i>e</i>	ֿ	<i>shureq</i>	<i>u</i>
ֿ	<i>short hireq</i>	<i>i</i>	ֿ	<i>khatuf qamets</i>	<i>o</i>
ֿ	<i>long hireq</i>	<i>i</i>	ֿ	<i>khatuf patakh</i>	<i>a</i>

Greek

α	=	a
β	=	b
γ	=	g
γ	=	n (before γ, κ, ξ, χ)
δ	=	d
ε	=	e
ζ	=	z
η	=	\bar{e}
θ	=	th
ι	=	i
κ	=	k
λ	=	l
μ	=	m
ν	=	n
ξ	=	x

ο	=	o
π	=	p
ρ	=	r
ρ̇	=	rh
σ, ς	=	s
τ	=	t
υ	=	y (not in diphthong)
υ	=	u (in diphthongs: au, eu, $\bar{e}u$, ou, ui)
φ	=	ph
χ	=	ch
ψ	=	ps
ω	=	\bar{o}
´	=	h (with vowel or diphthong)

Elmer A. Martens
Gordon Zerbe
11/01; 11/03; rev. 11/06; 9/10

RESPONSE GUIDE FOR READER-CONSULTANTS

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		Yes		Uncertain	
A. <u>General Readability</u>						
1. Vocabulary is understandable to persons of early college: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5	U
2. Tone is appropriate and positive: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5	U
3. Sentences are concise and direct: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5	U
4. Paragraphs are the proper length: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5	U
5. Style is fresh and engaging: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5	U
6. Flow of thought is clear: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5	U
B. <u>Specific Segments</u>						
1. Preview						
(a) Stimulates interest in what is to follow ("hook"): Comment:	1	2	3	4	5	U
(b) Provides helpful orientation to the unit: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5	U
2. Explanatory Notes						
(a) Big issues are addressed well: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5	U
(b) Level of technicality is about right: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5	U
(c) Appropriate engagement with scholars and positions: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5	U

	No			Yes		Uncertain
3. Text in Biblical Context						
(a) Engages the wider biblical context well Comment:	1	2	3	4	5	U
 (b) Enlarges understanding of the passage by showing how it is related to other parts of the Bible: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5	U
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	U
 (b) Balance between historical and contemporary references is good: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5	U
5. Commentary Introduction						
(a) Issues addressed are appropriate and on target:	1	2	3	4	5	U
(b) Length and amount of detail is appropriate: Comment:	1	2	3	4	5	U
6. Essay Section						
(a) Essays are appropriate and well written	1	2	3	4	5	U
(b) Essays have the right amount of detail and sophistication Comment, esp. on essays to add or delete:	1	2	3	4	5	U
7. Is anything important missing in any of the above sections?						
C. Other						
1. Interprets in and for the Believers Church tradition	1	2	3	4	5	U
Cites key documents, events, etc., representing this tradition	1	2	3	4	5	U
Engages BC tradition with some breadth, not just one group	1	2	3	4	5	U
2. Demonstrates careful reading and exegesis	1	2	3	4	5	U
Shows awareness of historical context of writing	1	2	3	4	5	U
Bibliography reflects good grasp of the field	1	2	3	4	5	U
Appropriate interaction with other scholars and positions	1	2	3	4	5	U
3. Meets needs of target audience and is thus likely to be well-received by pastors and lay leaders in the church	1	2	3	4	5	U
4. What suggestions for improvement do you have? (please include page numbers)						
5. Would you recommend this commentary to your friends for the study or teaching of this book of the Bible? Why or why not?						