

INTRODUCING BAKER BOOK HOUSE

From time to time this section will be devoted not to biblical literature as such, but to the publishers behind the scenes who produce this material. By doing so, we hope to introduce our readers to publishing trends and traditions and to contribute to a more informed use of the rich resources available in this field. Our aim shall be to present a balanced selection from the whole spectrum of publishers in this area, ranging from those working in a more conservative tradition to those representing a more critical approach.

The decision to start off with Baker Book House was motivated by two reasons. Firstly, publications of this firm have increasingly gained prominence and secondly, the history of Baker Book House reveals close parallels to the role played by reformed publishing in this country.

The interrelatedness of publishing, the dissemination of knowledge and the advancement of theology is a fascinating story. In the case of the history of Dutch theology, this interrelatedness has acquired a further dimension. In the churches of the Reformed tradition; the theological knowledge and insight of lay members and especially of the church council reached a remarkably high level and caused a tremor in the heart of many a young and inexperienced preacher. More often than not his sermon was thoroughly discussed and criticized by his council members. Their theological knowledge stemmed to a large extent from their regular and intensive reading of theological literature. The flourishing trade in second hand books and the well-attended auctions of booksellers in this field give proof of the level of interest in this literature. In the early sixties, it was not an uncommon sight to see a farmer from Kamper Eiland stacking his latest acquisitions on his bicycle after one of the lively auctions of Bos of Kampen and riding off into the polder, well supplied with reading matter for the long winter nights ahead.

The service of publisher and bookseller to his clients was on a very personal basis. Some twenty years ago in Holland, students and teachers of theology were regularly visited by representatives of *Scriptura* 4 (1981) pp 73-76

publishing houses, to assess their specific fields of interest and their preferences in new and used books, to be followed by an excellent service tailored to individual needs. What made this service so remarkable was the expertise and depth of theological knowledge of these booksellers which was the result of a personal interest in and commitment to theology. Publishers not only played an active part in stimulating theological thought, but also had a considerable influence on new developments in this field.

Wherever Reformed theology took root - Canada, the United States, South Africa, Australia - the role and influence of the publisher and bookseller continued. In the case of the United States, houses like Zondervan, Eerdmans and Baker came into being and served the large community of Hollanders who settled all over America, but especially in the western parts of Michigan. The story of Baker Book House is a classic example of this kind of development.

In 1925 the fourteen-year-old Herman Baker arrived with his parents in America from the Netherlands. They settled in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where the young Herman started working in the bookstore of a relative. He was put in charge of the used book department, which consisted mostly of theological volumes. Here began his love for books, especially the old classics and his extensive knowledge of theology. He also gained invaluable experience in the day-to-day running of a bookstore and began thinking about establishing his own business.

His chance came in 1939, when at the age of twenty-eight, he opened a bookstore at 1019 Wealthy Street, S E, Grand Rapids. With a stock of 500 used books from his personal library it was an unpretentious beginning, but he persevered and business soon flourished.

An important event took place in 1940 when Baker published his first book, *More than Conquerors*, a commentary on Revelation by the now well-known author, William Hendriksen. This book (which is still in print, selling more than 5 000 copies annually) proved to be typical of the type of literature Baker would always prefer to publish -

conservative, scholarly, biblical - the kind that had more than an even chance of becoming a standard reference work in the studies of a large number of ministers. Baker was more interested in books that would be reprinted at regular intervals over a long period of time than those that would zoom to the top of the charts for a few months and then disappear.

Soon Baker Book House became internationally known and orders were received from Australia, South Africa, England, Korea, Hungary. In 1948 the publishing program was considerably expanded. A new tradition began with the publishing of *Barnes Notes* on the Old and New Testament. Since then Baker specialized in the reprinting of out-of-print theological materials. Of similar nature was the thirteen-volume *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*. Of special value to scholars was the re-issue of classics in biblical interpretation like Luther's *Commentary on Galatians*, J B Lightfoot's *Biblical Essays* and Westcott's *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (all in 1979). These reprints include technical tools like Chamberlain's *Exegetical Grammar of the Greek New Testament*. Special mention should be made of *Burrows on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, an omnibus of the two well-known volumes *The Dead Sea Scrolls* and *More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls*. This paperback edition brings together a wealth of information on Qumran and to do so for a selling price of under twelve dollars is a remarkable achievement.

To stimulate and enrich the study of biblical texts, a series of aids was designed with the needs of the Bible student in mind. These include *Baker's Bible Atlas*, a best seller for years, the popular *Davis Dictionary of the Bible*, *Nave's Study Bible*, a revised and expanded edition using the King James Version, *Baker's Topical Bible*, *Cruden's Unabridged Concordance* and many others.

Up to 1971 the emphasis was almost exclusively on pastoral and scholarly books. In this year Baker Book House broadened its scope to enter the mass market. The first venture in this direction was *Fruits of the Spirit* by Ron Hembree. Since then, the books that appeal to general audiences have continued to multiply and they now

constitute about sixty percent of the Baker list. They cover such topics as personal growth, the cults, inspiration, family life, marriage, recreation and biography.

Scholarly textbooks, however, are an essential and expanding phase of Baker's publishing program. First editions, usually clothbound, are on the increase, with authors representing leading evangelical colleges and seminaries. Earlier and classic editions are reissued economically in paperback. The current catalogue includes subjects like biblical studies, hermeneutics, theology, church history, comparative religion, sects, archaeology, apologetics, philosophy, ethics, pastoral counselling, homiletics, missions, Christian education, hymnology, literature and social sciences.

From small beginnings, Baker has grown to a huge undertaking, serving an international clientele. Still devoted to its original ideal of publishing and distributing good Christian literature, the publishing program is constantly being updated by new titles and supplemented by books which have stood the test of time. Publications of Baker Book House are obtainable from religious bookstores and represented in this country by Word of Life Wholesale in Florida, Transvaal. Their

American address is: Baker Book House
1019 Wealthy, S E
Grand Rapids, Mich 49506
U S A.