

THE STATE OF EVANGELICAL PUBLISHING

By Dr. Vic Reasoner

Published, Jan. 2012

Four of the most important conservative Christian publishers all began as family businesses in Grand Rapids. Known as the “Netherlands Quartet,” because of their Dutch background, here is how they each began.

Kregel Publications began in 1909 when Louis Kregel started selling used theological books at his home. William B. Eerdmans began selling "ten-cent specials" to Dutch farmers in 1910 in order to pay his way through Calvin Theological Seminary. Pat and Bernie Zondervan, who were cousins, launched their own venture in 1931 by selling used Reformed books directly, then by mail. Herman Baker, a nephew of Louis Kregel, also established a book business in 1939.

But in recent years evangelical book publishers have been bought out. In the early 1980s Zondervan bought out Revell and Francis Asbury Press. Zondervan advanced a million dollars in a book deal with John Delorean in 1985. When the book bombed, they ultimately shut down their Francis Asbury imprint as well as Revell. In 1987 Zondervan became a wholly owned subsidiary of HarperCollins.

Thomas Nelson bought out Word Publishers in 1992. In November 2011 HarperCollins also bought out Thomas Nelson. But HarperCollins is owned by the News Corporation, with Rupert Murdoch as chairman. This is the world's second largest media conglomerate.

The bottom line is that the News Corporate now controls 50% of the Christian book market. Thus, Zondervan and Thomas Nelson exist to generate a profit for New Corp. They are going to publish whatever they think there is a market for. But Rupert Murdoch is not committed to evangelicalism, biblical reform, or genuine revival.

The result is that the average Christian bookstore is stocked with superficial, and sometimes heretical, products. Christian publishing sells \$4 billion annually. But take away the pop-psychology-self-help-feel-good books, the end-times fiction, the celebrity biography, and the opportunist author trying to capitalize on current events, and the average Christian book store would be left with little besides romance novels. We have become a generation of believers who are doctrinally illiterate and historically unaware of our roots. Yet the history of the Christian Church is dotted with classics from every time period. The best-seller list is dominated by a few celebrity authors.

Within the academic market, publishing is controlled by the guild. Those who seek to publish their research must submit it to peer review. The guild controls who can get published. It is a sport for these scholars to come up with some new twist and a rather narrow group of scholars all congratulate each other, but few have obtained the academic pedigree necessary to play this game.

Anyone who has a message or is contending for truth will probably have to resort to self publication. A small Calvinistic publisher declared that they publish because books are the carriers of the big ideas!

Most major Wesleyan publishers would not recognize Methodist theology if they were hit over the head with a hardbound volume of Wesley's 52 Standard Sermons. The current spate of Wesley studies often equates John Wesley with process philosophy, feminism, liberal theology, and

an errant Bible. Thus Fundamental Wesleyan Publishers was formed in 1991 to contend for historic Methodist doctrine.