

## ORDINATION OF WOMEN IN THE BRETHREN CHURCH: A CASE STUDY FROM THE ANABAPTIST-PIETIST TRADITION

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In the current discussions about whether women should be ordained and allowed to serve as pastors, much has been heard in Protestantism from two directions: the historic Lutheran, Anglican and Reformed positions on the one hand and, on the other, the more recent holiness, pentecostal and charismatic viewpoints. It is the purpose of this paper to offer a case study on the subject from the Brethren Church, a small denomination in the anabaptist-pietist tradition.

The Brethren, one of the historic peace churches (along with Mennonites and Quakers), have participated in the American scene since 1719 when the first group of them came to Philadelphia. These German Baptist Brethren, as they came to be called, have no organic connection with other bodies using the name Brethren (e.g. Brethren in Christ, Mennonite Brethren, Moravian Brethren, Plymouth Brethren, United Brethren).

The German Baptist Brethren began in 1708 as part of the pietistic renewal that affected both Lutheran and Reformed churches. One of the well-known pietist revival preachers was the nobleman Ernst Christoph Hochmann von Hochenau (1670-1721), who experienced a profound conversion under August Hermann Francke while studying at the University of Halle. Hochmann became an itinerant evangelist preaching separation from the institutional Church throughout the Lower Rhine valley early in the eighteenth century. He preached especially in the Palatinate and Wittgenstein, territories where some princes tolerated a diversity of Christian loyalties.<sup>1</sup>

One of Hochmann's most dedicated converts was a young miller named Alexander Mack (1679-1735), the third son of Johann Philip Mack, vineyard keeper and miller at Schreischeim near Heidelberg. The father had served twice as mayor of the town and was an elder in the Reformed Church.<sup>2</sup> Young

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<sup>1</sup>D. F. Durnbaugh, "Hochmann von Hochenau," *Brethren Encyclopedia* (Philadelphia: Brethren Encyclopedia, 1983), 1. 614. "Probably the most winsome figure among Radical Pietists was Ernst Christoph Hochmann von Hochenau (1670-1721). He was the beloved friend of the awakened among the Reformed, Lutherans, and Anabaptists, the confidant of pietistically-inclined nobility, and the bold proclaimer of the love of God in Christ Jesus to not only the 'sects' but also the Jews" (D. R. Stoffer, *The Background and Development of Thought and Practice in the German Baptist Brethren [Dunker] and the Brethren [Progressive] Churches, c. 1650-1979* [dissertation; Fuller Theological Seminary, 1980] 118).

<sup>2</sup>W. G. Willoughby, "Mack, Alexander" and "Mack, Johann Philip," *Brethren Encyclopedia*, 1. 775-778. Cf. Willoughby's *Counting the Cost: The Life of Alexander Mack, 1679-1735* (Elgin: Brethren, 1979).

Mack was the husband of Anna Margarethe Kling (1680–1720), daughter of Johann Valentin Kling, innkeeper at Schreischeim, member of the town council, and—like Alexander Mack’s father—an elder in the Reformed Church.<sup>3</sup> Young Mack, whose generous inheritance rendered him financially secure, came under the fiery Hochmann’s preaching and in 1706 accompanied him on an evangelistic tour. Together they proclaimed a new call to piety, to be facilitated by small-group Bible studies and lay leadership. They were implementing the summons originally sounded in 1675 by the Lutheran Philip Jacob Spener in his *Pia Desideria*.<sup>4</sup> Hochmann’s tendency was to encourage following the inner Spirit rather than forming external structures, with the result that his converts became radical—i.e., separatistic—pietists.<sup>5</sup>

As Alexander Mack and his friends studied Scripture, they gradually reached a conclusion different from Hochmann’s on this point. The teachings of Jesus, as they read them, assumed and demanded an organized fellowship of believers.<sup>6</sup> A version of the gospel that fostered individual freedom without corporate responsibility seemed to them a misrepresentation of what they understood the NT to teach. So it was that, in August 1708, Alexander and Anna Margarethe Mack together with six other persons (most of them less than thirty years old) entered into solemn covenant with one another to obey all the teachings of Scripture as they perceived them and to do so in a corporate context. These original eight, all having been baptized as infants in the Reformed or Lutheran churches, sealed their covenant by entering into believers’ baptism by trine immersion.<sup>7</sup>

They did not interpret their act as founding a new church but as a restoration of NT Christianity. They made no reference at the time to Martin Luther’s ideals, but a later historian of the movement has noted the similarity of their intention to what the Reformer envisioned early in his career. In his Preface to *The German Mass* (1523) Luther wrote:

[Those] who want to be Christians in earnest and who profess the gospel with hand and mouth . . . should sign their names and meet alone in a house somewhere to pray, to read, to baptize, to receive the sacrament, and do other Christian works. According to this order, those who do not lead Christian lives could be known, reproved, corrected, cast out, or excommunicated, according to the rule of Christ,

<sup>3</sup>W. G. Willoughby, “Kling, Johann Valentin,” *Brethren Encyclopedia*, 2. 702.

<sup>4</sup>P. J. Spener, *Pia Desideria* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964).

<sup>5</sup>Hochmann held to three themes throughout his preaching career: “that he was called by God to preach, that the true church was spiritual, not institutional, and that the second coming of Jesus Christ was imminent” (Durnbaugh, “Hochmann”).

<sup>6</sup>“Though Hochmann and the Brethren shared the desire for the establishment of a visible community, their motivations for this desire had little in common. Hochmann’s Spirit-impelled, eschatological fellowship belonged literally to a different world from the Brethren *Gemeinde* based on a desire to fulfill the New Testament commands and examples for baptism, communion, and discipline” (Stoffer, *Background* 137; cf. pp. 139–140).

<sup>7</sup>Cf. the preface to Mack’s writings composed in 1774 by his son, Alexander Mack, Jr., in D. F. Durnbaugh, *European Origins of the Brethren* (Elgin: Brethren, 1958) 120–122.

Matthew 18. Here one could also solicit benevolent gifts to be willingly given and distributed to the poor, according to St. Paul's example, II Corinthians 9. Here would be no need of much and elaborate singing. Here one could set out a brief and neat order for baptism and the sacrament and center everything on the Word, prayer, and love.<sup>8</sup>

The Reformer went on to note that, as of 1523, he did not see either a public demand for such a house-church fellowship or the necessary leadership for such a movement.

Although Luther did not follow through on this early proposal, the anabaptists of Switzerland and South Germany believed that they did.<sup>9</sup> Following their beginnings in 1525 they developed around a cluster of core beliefs: Biblicism; the necessity of conversion; discipleship as obedience to the Word of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit; the concept of the believers' Church; the resulting necessity of separating state and Church; an ethic of nonresistant love; the imperative of missionary witness; and such outward structures as believers' baptism, the Lord's supper, and the ban.<sup>10</sup> The outward signs of their commitment came in for special emphasis in the Schleitheim Confession of 1527.<sup>11</sup>

When Alexander Mack and his pietist friends joined together in 1708 to renew the Church, they adopted an anabaptist ecclesiology. That influence had already existed in the Palatinate for a half century because many Swiss anabaptist-Mennonite farmers had been welcomed into the territory after the Thirty Years' War had decimated the countryside.<sup>12</sup> All radical pietists such as Hochmann owed much to the anabaptist movement, but the Brethren fused the two together by expressing a pietist theology in an anabaptist ecclesiology. "Having originated in the radical pietist movement, the Brethren became a sect emphasizing the movement's anabaptist strain and stressing a sober biblicism and the example of the primitive or New Testament church as historians of their day described it."<sup>13</sup>

Mack and company, of course, envisioned themselves as simply following the dictates of the NT.<sup>14</sup> It is later analyses that have seen the historical influ-

<sup>8</sup>*Liturgy and Hymns* (ed. U. S. Leupold; *Luther's Works*; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), 53. 61–67. The passage received pride of place in its use in D. F. Durnbaugh, *The Believer's Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (New York: Macmillan, 1968) 3–4.

<sup>9</sup>Radical pietists as well (cf. Stoffer, *Background* 56).

<sup>10</sup>C. J. Dyck, "Anabaptism," *Brethren Encyclopedia*, 1. 29.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. J. H. Leith, *Creeeds of the Churches* (3d rev. ed.; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982) 281–292. See also pp. 292–308 for the Dordrecht Confession (1632).

<sup>12</sup>Dyck, "Anabaptism."

<sup>13</sup>C. D. Ensign, "Radical German Pietism," *Brethren Encyclopedia*, 2. 1080.

<sup>14</sup>"It cannot be claimed that Alexander Mack was a religious innovator; he accepted simply and uncritically the sources which were available to him—Scripture, histories, and discussions with Mennonites and Radical Pietists. It cannot be said that he was a skilled theologian and systematician; he was too much of a pastor for that, focusing his attention on the special problems that faced his

ences coming through both mainline Protestantism as reawakened after 1675 and the anabaptist left wing of the Reformation, if indeed anabaptism was Protestant at all.<sup>15</sup> This dual heritage meant that the Brethren assumed what was central to Protestant faith without saying much about it. For example, one of their members reporting on a prison interrogation in 1717 about their relationship to the Reformed Church stated:

If the Reformed conducted themselves according to the Heidelberg Catechism, and if only the infant baptism, swearing of oaths, and the sixtieth question [on justification by faith] were different, we could then soon agree with you.<sup>16</sup>

While this statement represents the nearness that some Brethren felt at some times to mainline Protestantism, others at other times expressed their closeness to the anabaptist-Mennonite persuasion, for the Brethren occasionally were considered to be Mennonites who differed only in their insistence on believers' baptism by trine immersion.<sup>17</sup>

Because this new group, which was both anabaptist and pietist, violated the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) limiting church membership in Germany to Catholic, Lutheran, or Reformed, the Brethren came under fire. There were incidents of imprisonment, torture, economic reprisal, and slavery at the hands of their Protestant contemporaries.<sup>18</sup> A group of Brethren forsook the mother country in 1719 and emigrated to Pennsylvania in order to seek freedom of religion. In 1720 Alexander Mack led another forty Brethren families to Friesland in the Netherlands, where the Mennonites warmly welcomed them. By 1729, since the economic situation in Friesland was not promising and there seemed little opportunity for evangelizing, these Brethren decided to join those of their number who had settled in America a decade earlier.<sup>19</sup> Alexander Mack, now a widower fifty years of age, came to Pennsylvania with this second group. Some families chose to remain in Europe, but for all practical purposes the movement called the German Baptists or German Baptist Brethren (Dunkers) had emigrated to the British Colonies more than a generation before the Declaration of Independence.

With the American Revolution came new difficulties, for the Brethren were

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small flock. What can be stated about Mack is that he was a devoted disciple of Jesus Christ who sought to obey Him and follow Him in every facet of his life. By this plumbline Mack judged the theological terrain (Reformed, Anabaptist, Pietist) on which he was to build the Brethren fellowship" (Stoffer, *Background* 264).

<sup>15</sup>Cf. W. Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant* (Waterloo: Conrad, 1973).

<sup>16</sup>Cited in Durnbaugh, *European* 249–250. The account, written in 1763, was by W. Grahe who, along with six other men, was arrested in 1717 for being baptized by the Brethren. The seven were sentenced to life imprisonment at hard labor but were released after nearly four years. Their problems with the Reformed Church reflected (1) ethical concern for proper conduct on the part of church members and (2) theological concern over Questions 60, 74, 99 and 101 of the Heidelberg Catechism, where the Brethren preferred a more anabaptist interpretation to the usual Reformed viewpoint.

<sup>17</sup>Stoffer, *Background* 294–295.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Durnbaugh, *European* 217–280 ("Suppression").

<sup>19</sup>Willoughby, "Mack, Alexander," *Brethren Encyclopedia*, 2. 777.

German-speaking people in a new English-speaking nation. Like other similar groups they turned increasingly inward in order to assure both existence and identity. Language, dress, and church practice tended to freeze in place with the passing of the first two generations and the coming of the nineteenth century. By 1850, more than a century after their arrival in Philadelphia, they were publishing for the Church in English. Numerous questions began to surface in the new literature. Antiquated standards of dress, the propriety of higher education, the question of whether ministers should be trained and/or salaried, the new American practice of holding extended (protracted) revival meetings, and the debate over whether to engage in overseas missionary activity all wracked the Church between 1850 and 1880.

The result was that, between 1881 and 1883, the German Baptist Brethren divided into three groups. The old German Baptist Brethren, who—as their name implies—were traditionalists, seceded in 1881. In 1882 the progressives were expelled, and a year later they took out incorporation papers as the Brethren Church with headquarters in Ashland, Ohio, where they had managed to retain control of Ashland College. The great majority of the movement, however, remained in the parent body, the German Baptist Brethren, who changed their name in 1908 to the Church of the Brethren.

The Brethren Church (or Ashland Brethren, as they were often called) celebrated their centennial in 1983. During that hundred years they experienced a second division, this one coming in 1939 and creating the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches with headquarters at Winona Lake, Indiana. With the approach of the 1983 centennial celebration, the Ashland group became aware of a new historical observation: Throughout most of that hundred years there had always been one or more Brethren women recognized for Christian ministry. In fact, during the first part of the century there was significant and sustained use of women in the ministry of the Brethren Church. It will be the purpose of the remainder of this paper to describe ordination of women in the Brethren Church and to assess some possible reasons for its decline.

Within a dozen years after its founding in 1882–83, the Brethren Church had officially supported the right of women to ordination and had begun to employ them in its ministry. From the available data, this seems to have started with the action of the Michigan district conference in 1890, when it passed the following resolution: “Women are eligible to the office of minister or deacon from the following scriptures: Acts 2:18; 8:1–4; 15:32; 18:26; Rom. 16:3; 2 Cor. 3:17.”<sup>20</sup> The next year the Indiana district conference adopted a similar motion: “*Resolved*, that we extend the hand of welcome to our sisters to enter the ministerial field when possessing the necessary qualifications.”<sup>21</sup> The Illiokota conference of the same year (1891) included in its actions a motion “that no distinction be made in representative bodies of the church on the basis of sex.”<sup>22</sup>

A fourth district, Pennsylvania, went on record in 1892 as follows: “*Re-*

<sup>20</sup>*The Brethren Annual* ([hereafter abbreviated *BrA*] Ashland: Brethren Publishing, 1891) 26.

<sup>21</sup>*BrA* (1892) 23.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 26.

*solved*: That we regard woman's work as essential to the salvation of the world, and that her divine mission is the same as man's."<sup>23</sup> In the following year the general conference, just ten years after the new denomination began, passed this affirmation: "*Resolved*, That this convention recognizes and appreciates the force of the expression in Holy Writ: 'There is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ'."<sup>24</sup> Finally, the Ohio district conference of 1894 heard their Committee on Woman's work report as follows: "The sisters certainly feel the pressing need of more ministers in the Brethren church [sic] and realizing this fact we deem the preparation of young men and women for the ministry of first importance in extending the missionary cause and promoting the best interests of the church."<sup>25</sup>

Therefore it was quite appropriate in 1895 for the leading spokesman of the Brethren Church to write: "I am glad I never stood in the way of women preaching, and that I belong to a church that assists them in doing so."<sup>26</sup> He was Henry R. Holsinger, leader of the Progressive Brethren at the time of their expulsion from the German Baptists and also editor (1883–84, 1889–92) of the denominational weekly, *The Brethren Evangelist*. Thus the Brethren Church in the first dozen years of its life went on record through its best-known personage and multiple conferences as favoring the equality of women and men in the Church and the inclusion of women in the ministerial ranks.

The Brethren Church since then acknowledged approximately forty women as ministers by ordination and/or by allowing them to serve as pastors without ordained status.<sup>27</sup> The majority of these were in the period 1890 to 1920, after which the practice declined until by the 1950s and 1960s it was virtually unknown. We turn to a description of the life and work of some of the women so designated. This does not imply that their accomplishments were more important than others who will not be described. It is just that more data are available about some than concerning others.<sup>28</sup>

The first woman to be ordained in the Brethren Church was a teacher-evangelist from Masontown, Pennsylvania, Mary Malinda Sterling (1859–1933).<sup>29</sup> She began to teach at nineteen and continued for three years, studying

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>24</sup>BrA (1895) 10.

<sup>25</sup>BrA (1894) 12.

<sup>26</sup>H. R. Holsinger, "Holsingerisms," *The Brethren Evangelist* (hereafter abbreviated *BE*) 17 (June 26, 1895) 3.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. J. R. Flora, "Brethren Women in Ministry: Century One," *Ashland Theological Journal* 15 (1982) 18–35; "Ninety Years of Brethren Women in Ministry," *Ashland Theological Journal* 17 (1984) 4–21.

<sup>28</sup>Research into the beginning of women's ordination among the Brethren is hampered because no copies of *BE* for 1889–93 exist in any library collection.

<sup>29</sup>For general information on Sterling, in addition to summaries cited in n. 27, cf. H. R. Holsinger, *History of the Tunkers and the Brethren Church* (Oakland: Pacific, 1901) 735; F. S. Sibert, "News from the Field" and "A Pastor's Tribute," *BE* 55 (August 19, 1933) 13–14; H. C. Funderburg, "Bits of Brethren History," *BE* 71 (February 26, 1949); B. E. Weidenhamer, "Sterling, Mary Malinda," *Brethren Encyclopedia*, 2. 1221.

meanwhile at Monongahela College, from which she graduated in 1882. At that time she and her family became charter members of the Brethren Church in Masontown, from which she went to Ashland, Ohio. There she taught on the Ashland College faculty in 1883–84. Returning to Pennsylvania she continued her studies until she received the Master of Arts degree from Monongahela College in 1887. She was at that time undoubtedly the most highly educated woman in the denomination.

Thus when the 1887 national conference authorized the forming of a women's auxiliary organization twenty-eight-year-old Mary Sterling became its first president. Incorporated in 1888, it was known as the S.S.C.E. (Sister's Society for Christian Endeavor). She continued as president for five years until the society was reorganized in 1892 with a different constitution. During the year 1889 the trustees of the S.S.C.E. (some of whom were men) called her to the ministry, and her home congregation confirmed that initiative by unanimous vote. She was ordained at Masontown in 1890, thus achieving a double distinction: She was the first president of the national women's auxiliary and the first Brethren woman ordained to the ministry.

She served as pastor of her home church for two periods, 1891–94 and 1902–06. Her respect in the denomination was such that she preached the Sunday morning sermon for the 1894 general conference at Ashland College. In the following year she served the first of several terms as state evangelist for the Pennsylvania district. In that capacity she traveled to preach in churches and camp meetings, organized infant congregations, and baptized new believers. This activity took her beyond Pennsylvania into New Jersey and West Virginia.

In June 1894 the denomination's periodical, *The Brethren Evangelist*, carried a brief report of her evangelistic work in her own words:

Dear Evangelist: I have spent the past seven months preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout West Virginia and Pennsylvania. The known result of which effort has been twenty-seven additions to the Brethren Church, eighteen of whom I baptized. The number of confessions and additions to other churches is by me unknown; for I have only sixty-two names recorded. In 187 days I preached 207 sermons, holding thirteen protracted meetings, eight of these outside of Brethren precincts. Five years active experience in the ministry has taught me that prejudice against women's preaching is not as strong as one might suppose.<sup>30</sup>

For the next year (1895–96) she reported to the Pennsylvania district conference that she had preached 251 sermons, baptized 15 converts, and conducted three communion services while receiving \$68.39 in offerings and accumulating expenses of \$57.57.<sup>31</sup> Holsinger reported that in eleven years (1889–1900) Mary Sterling preached a total of 1,157 sermons and brought seventy-eight persons into the Brethren Church, forty-eight of whom she personally baptized.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup>BE 16 (June 16, 1894) 12 (punctuation unaltered).

<sup>31</sup>BE 18 (July 29, 1896) 4; BE 18 (October 28, 1896) 12.

<sup>32</sup>Holsinger, *History* 735.

Her name was included in the published ministerial lists of *The Brethren Annual* every year from 1892 until 1933, when she died at the age of seventy-three. A later historian, who did not agree with her kind of Christian service, described Sterling as "a remarkable woman . . . a splendid leader."<sup>33</sup>

That same description could apply as well to the second woman ordained in the Brethren Church, Laura E. N. Grossnickle Hedrick (1858–1934).<sup>34</sup> A native of Mapleville, Maryland, near Hagerstown, she began to teach at seventeen and continued thirteen years, becoming the first woman in Washington County to hold a first-class teaching certificate.

In 1891 Grossnickle was called to become pastor of the Fairview Brethren Church near South Bend, Indiana, but her home congregation hesitated to ordain her. On the way to Fairview she attended the Ohio district conference where she was ordained, then continued to South Bend where she worked as pastor for three years (1891–94). Sometime during that pastorate she wrote a sixteen-page booklet, "Woman's Divine Right to Preach the Gospel."

Her considerable abilities became well known, for she preached the Tuesday evening sermon at the 1892 national conference held at Warsaw, Indiana. Three days later, at the Friday morning session, she delivered a public address on "Woman's Work in the Church." After her address the conference passed the following resolution: "That this National Convention extends to the sisters all privileges which the brethren claim for themselves."<sup>35</sup> Six weeks later she spoke to the Illiokota district conference, and the next spring she preached at the meeting of the Indiana Ministerial Association. During 1892–93 she was secretary of the board of directors of the National Brethren Ministerial Association and contributed often to the denominational weekly.

But Grossnickle's greatest work was yet to come. In 1894 she assumed the presidency of the Sisters' Society for Christian Endeavor. She finished the year as pastor of the Fairview congregation, then began 1895 by moving among the churches for six months as a field organizer for the women's auxiliary. In the first half of 1895 she traveled constantly, preaching nearly every night and twice on Sundays. From January through June, using train and buggy, she visited 77 churches and organized thirty-eight new S.S.C.E. groups.<sup>36</sup>

During the four years of her presidency she used her great energy to build the women's work into a strong, cohesive force in the denomination. She stepped down as president in 1898 when she married George W. Hedrick, a widower of Dayton, Virginia. After that she served as pastor of the Dayton

<sup>33</sup>H. A. Kent, Sr., *Conquering Frontiers: A History of The Brethren Church (The National Fellowship of Brethren Churches)* (rev. ed.; Winona Lake: BMH, 1972) 121.

<sup>34</sup>For general sources on Grossnickle Hedrick, in addition to summaries cited in n. 27, cf. Holsinger, *History* 682, 684–685; *BE* 56 (September 22, 1934) 16; F. Ankrum, "Laura Grossnickle Hedrick," *BE* 79 (June 8, 1957) 4–5, 7; *BE* 79 (July 13, 1957) 4–6; S. W. Hyland, "Hedrick, Laura E. N. Grossnickle," *Brethren Encyclopedia*, 1. 593; Jerry and J. A. Flora, "The Passing of the Pioneers: Laura Grossnickle Hedrick," *BE* 106 (November 1984) 6–7.

<sup>35</sup>*BrA* (1892) 43.

<sup>36</sup>*BrA* (1896) 7.



Brethren Church for several years until her husband's asthma led them to move in 1910 to Hallandale, Florida. There she organized and taught a union Sunday-school class for many years. The Hedricks eventually transferred their church membership to Hagerstown, Maryland, where they usually spent the summers. Laura Grossnickle Hedrick was especially pleased that the pastor at Hagerstown had been one of her converts at Fairview, Indiana, in the 1890s. Her life, in both birth and death, overlapped that of Mary Sterling by one year, and she died in 1934 at the age of seventy-six. Since then she has twice been the subject of major articles in the denomination's periodical—the only ordained Brethren woman to be so honored.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to these two, nine others began to serve in ministry during the decade of the 1890s.<sup>38</sup> We can pause only long enough to describe three of them very briefly. (1) Clara Myers Flora (1850–c. 1920) entered the ministry in 1892 and worked for more than twenty years in south central Iowa along with her husband. Their names appear together in the denomination's ministerial lists from 1892 through 1916.<sup>39</sup> (2) Sarah (Sadie) Freas Gibbons Evanson (1864–1920) served as pastor at Waterloo, Iowa; Chicago, Illinois; Independence, Kansas; Leon, Iowa; Portis, Kansas; and St. Joseph, Missouri. She was one of several ordained Brethren women whose work combined home missionary and pastoral roles.<sup>40</sup> (3) Mary Melissa Wageman Bauman (1876–1909) was one of two women credited with founding the girls' work in the Brethren Church. From her few published writings (she died of typhoid fever at thirty-three) it appears that she was one of the most intelligent and articulate of the early women in Brethren ministry.<sup>41</sup>

During the decade 1901–1910 another eleven women entered the denomination's ministry.<sup>42</sup> From what is presently known, the most outstanding of

<sup>37</sup>Cf. articles by Ankrum and Floras, n. 34.

<sup>38</sup>Esther L. Dickey (pastor in Indiana, 1892–94); Lizzie Masters (pastor in Iowa, 1893–99); Clara Myers Flora (pastor in Iowa, c. 1892–1916); Etta Tombaugh (listed among Indiana ministers, 1894–98); Sarah (Sadie) Freas Gibbons Evanson (ordained 1896); Mary Melissa Wageman Bauman (ordained 1899); Lovina Ellen Young Meyers (Holsinger, *History* 699, includes her photograph in the group he called "women preachers"—the only present evidence of her ministerial standing); Margaret and Mary Hoover (approximate date; they are said to have preached often in Ohio).

<sup>39</sup>Flora, "Brethren Women" 22–23.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.* Cf. her articles "Christian Growth," *BE* 22 (March 22, 1900) 9–10; "Woman's New Place in the World Under Christianity," *BE* 30 (December 30, 1908) 13; "Loyalty to the Holy Spirit," *BE* 31 (December 1, 1909) 4–5.

<sup>42</sup>Catherine Parker (ordained 1901); Vianna Detwiler (ordained 1901); Antonia Wanker (ordained; pastored in Iowa 1902–17); Alice M. Harley (ordained 1903; preached at Allentown, Pennsylvania); Mrs. J. B. Richard (ordained; pastor at Allentown); Mrs. T. E. Richards (ordained; pastor at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 1907–10); Bertha May Bell (included in ministerial list, 1908); Alveretta (Etta) Warvel Bowman (pastor at North Manchester, Indiana, 1909; included in ministerial lists, 1909–31); Margaret A. Cooke (pastor in Pennsylvania, 1909–20); Mrs. P. J. Jennings (pastor in Virginia, 1909–c. 1917); Maude Cripe Webb (pastor without ordination in Indiana and Virginia, 1909–10; worked in Argentina 1911–17 after being "set aside by the laying on of hands" in 1910; pastor in Kansas, 1918; received into National Brethren Ministerial Association, 1939).

these may have been Vianna Detwiler (died in 1921), a home missionary and fourth president of the national women's work (1898–1905).<sup>43</sup> She was ordained at Philadelphia in 1901 while she was S.S.C.E. president. Having attended the state normal school in Maryland, she also studied at Ashland College and the University of Chicago. Her ministry specialized in urban mission work in Washington, D.C.; Philadelphia; Chicago; Montreal, Quebec; Pittsburgh; and Spokane, Washington. A prolific writer, she alternately reported her activity to the denomination, or offered devotional contributions, or challenged women to become more active in the Church and its ministry. She died suddenly in 1921 following a very brief illness.

Five women entered the Brethren ministry in the decade 1911–1920.<sup>44</sup> The best known of these was undoubtedly Dr. Florence Alma Newberry Gribble (1880–1942), who gave more than thirty years to medical missions in French Equatorial Africa.<sup>45</sup> The most colorful of the five was likely Emma Aboud (1880–1967), a native of Lebanon who emigrated to the United States around 1894. Using her knowledge of Middle Eastern customs and at times adopting native dress, she became a well-known evangelist in the Brethren Church from 1920 on. She preached to standing-room-only audiences and then went on to open-air evangelism in New York City and at Coney Island.<sup>46</sup>

During the 1920s three women entered the Brethren ministry.<sup>47</sup> Two of these were teachers who held brief pastorates, while the other was a missionary nurse who served in French Equatorial Africa for thirty-five years.

Only one woman was ordained in the decade of the 1930s, a missionary who began her work in Argentina in 1931.<sup>48</sup> Another woman was ordained in the 1940s.<sup>49</sup> She filled the pastorate vacated by her husband when he entered military service, and after World War II they copastored for four years. Similarly,

<sup>43</sup>For general information on Detwiler, in addition to the summaries cited in n. 27, cf. *BE* 25 (March 4, 1903) 8; *BE* 43 (November 30, 1921) 15; *BE* 43 (December 14, 1921) 14; T. P. Garner, "Detwiler, Vianna," *Brethren Encyclopedia*, 1. 381.

<sup>44</sup>Grace Prudence Hostetler Fetters (copastor with her husband in Ohio, Michigan and Indiana, 1914–20); Dr. Florence Alma Newberry Gribble (served in medical missions in French Equatorial Africa, 1908–42; ordained 1917); Nora Pearl Bracken Davis (ordained 1919); Mary Pence (ordained 1919; included in published ministerial lists, 1920–40); Emma Aboud (received into National Brethren Ministerial Association, 1920).

<sup>45</sup>See her autobiography, *Stranger Than Fiction* (Winona Lake: Brethren Missionary Herald, 1950); S. W. Beaver, "Gribble, Florence Alma Newberry," *Brethren Encyclopedia*, 1. 573.

<sup>46</sup>Flora, "Brethren Women" 28; C. Lybarger, "Aboud, Emma," *Brethren Encyclopedia*, 1. 2.

<sup>47</sup>Grace P. Srack (pastor in Iowa, 1922–25); Florence Bickel (ordained 1922; missionary nurse in French Equatorial Africa, 1923–58); Edna Nicholas (ordained 1928; named in ministerial lists, 1930–67; accepted into National Brethren Ministerial Association, 1939).

<sup>48</sup>Laura Evangeline Larson Wagner (missionary in Argentina from 1931; included in ministerial lists, 1932–35).

<sup>49</sup>Loretta Carrithers (ordained 1948; received into National Brethren Ministerial Association, 1949; copastor with her husband in Ohio, 1949–53).

in the 1950s only one woman was ordained, and she was so designated in 1957 to supplement the lack in her husband's pastoral work caused by his poor health.<sup>50</sup> After two years both she and her husband withdrew from the denomination.

For a quarter century following 1957, no more women were ordained in the Brethren Church. However, several were included in published lists of ministers.<sup>51</sup> Then in 1974 the general conference adopted the following recommendation from its moderator: "Let us encourage women and men to engage in team ministry as ordained persons or as lay persons."<sup>52</sup> Such action had no binding authority; it was suggestive only. The result is that since 1974 two women were ordained in the Indiana district, and one in the southwest district was refused ordination on the grounds of her sex.<sup>53</sup>

The historical picture, then, appears to be as follows: The Brethren Church began to ordain women in 1890 and allowed them to work as pastors with or without ordination. During the decade of the 1890s ten women entered Brethren ministry, and this rate continued in the first decade of the twentieth century when eleven women began their ministries. In the 1910s only five started to serve in this way, after which the number of entries declined to three in the 1920s, one in the 1930s, one in the 1940s, one in the 1950s, and none in the 1960s and 1970s. According to published lists in *The Brethren Annual*, the number peaked in the 1910s but never amounted to more than fifteen women at any time, which would be ten percent or less of the denomination's ministers.

How is this picture to be explained or evaluated? Evaluation will likely depend on whether one favors such a practice.<sup>54</sup> But some attempt must be made at explaining the historical picture. A major historian of the Grace Brethren, who shared this situation from 1890 to 1940, has proposed a solution. The practice fell into disfavor, he says, when better understanding of Scripture arose among the Brethren.<sup>55</sup> He cites no evidence to substantiate such an explanation, however, nor was any article ever published in the denominational periodical opposing the ordination of women. Although from the beginning there were those who did not agree with ordaining women or allowing them to serve

<sup>50</sup>Anne Black (ordained 1957).

<sup>51</sup>Mary Sparks (pastor in Pennsylvania, 1964–66); Cora Jean Black (pastor in Pennsylvania, 1965–67); Jenny Loi (missionary in Malaysia; included in list of pastors and elders, 1979–80).

<sup>52</sup>BE 96 (August 24, 1974) 7; reprinted in *BrA* (1974) 26. The action came as a recommendation from the moderator, the Rev. P. D. Steiner (copastor with his wife, the Rev. Donna Steiner, of the Church of the Brethren), was endorsed by the Executive Committee, and was adopted without dissent by the General Conference.

<sup>53</sup>Jennifer Jones Ray and Kathleen Rinehart Mitchell were ordained in 1983 and 1985 respectively. Susan White Hyland, whose research while a student at Ashland Theological Seminary may have initiated the decade of study that has followed, was rejected. Cf. her article, "The Sisters of the Brethren," *BE* 101 (May 1979) 4–7.

<sup>54</sup>I described my position favoring ordination of women in an unpublished paper prepared for the 1983 Brethren Pastors' Conference.

<sup>55</sup>Kent, *Conquering* 121.

as pastors,<sup>56</sup> the National Brethren Ministerial Association never took action against such practice, nor do their published minutes report any discussion of the question prior to the mid-1980s. Therefore we must look further to explain why ordination of women among the Brethren fell into disfavor.

A more likely solution may be found in a combination of ecclesiastical and sociological factors in American life prior to and following World War I. For example, the famed World Missionary Conference of 1910 was held in Edinburgh, and one of its attendees was the Rev. Vianna Detwiler of the Brethren Church. But at the same time more and more items began to appear in *The Brethren Evangelist* challenging men to assume leadership in the church. The fear was sometimes expressed that, unless this happened, Christianity would become effeminate and weak.<sup>57</sup>

Shortly after the Edinburgh conference the Brethren began to struggle with liberal theology. As a denomination without a written creed, they quickly identified with fundamentalism when some modernist elements surfaced in their midst between 1913 and 1921.<sup>58</sup> The writing of a brief statement of faith in the latter year proved temporarily helpful,<sup>59</sup> but tensions continued to trouble the denomination. Fundamentalism came more and more into the spotlight with its frequent call to women to find their place not in the pastorate but either in the home or on the mission field.<sup>60</sup>

With the passage of the eighteenth and nineteenth amendments to the United States Constitution, American women gained two long-standing goals: the prohibition of alcoholic beverages (1919) and the guarantee of the right to vote (1920). The drive for temperance and suffrage had been frequently fueled

<sup>56</sup>The editor of *BE* replied to a reader's question in 1896 by stating that "the Brethren Church now has no less than five or six regularly ordained women in the ministry and they are doing an excellent work. . . . Among us, however, are those who seriously doubt whether any Gospel authority can be found for ordaining a woman to Eldership in the Church" (*BE* 18 [October 21, 1896] 10-11).

<sup>57</sup>Cf. e.g. A. D. Gnagey, "The Predominance of Women in the Churches," *BE* 31 (March 24, 1909) 1; "Feminizing the Church," *BE* 33 (January 18, 1911) 3.

<sup>58</sup>See Stoffer, *Background* 571-619 ("The Liberal Controversy, 1913-1921"). Cf. J. L. Gillin, "My Apologia," *BE* 41 (June 4, 1919) 5-6, in which he contrasted "liberty of speech and thought" with "the Torrey brand of so-called orthodoxy."

<sup>59</sup>"The Message of the Brethren Ministry" (1921) contains paragraphs on the nature and authority of Scripture, Christian fundamentals, and Brethren distinctives, but it does not speak to the question of women in ministry.

<sup>60</sup>"The fundamentalist movement generally allowed women only quite subordinate roles. When experiential emphasis predominated, the idea that Pentecost opened a dispensation when women would prophesy (as the prophet Joel suggested) might be accepted. Yet the Baconian Biblicism conflicted with such ideals, due to the Pauline statements about women. Apparently even in Holiness traditions the role of women in the church declined during the fundamentalist era" (G. M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* [New York: Oxford University, 1980] 249-250 n. 40). Cf. D. Martin, "Ashland College versus Ashland Seminary (1921-37): Prelude to Schism," *Brethren Life and Thought* 21 (Winter 1976) 37-50; "What Has Divided the Brethren Church," *Brethren Life and Thought* 21 (Spring 1976) 107-119.

by evangelical women, Brethren included.<sup>61</sup> But with the achievement of these goals much energy was dissipated and, as the 1920s gave rise to the excesses of the flapper era and the bootlegging scandals, disappointment, discouragement and backlash set in.

While the Brethren Church's membership grew in the period following World War I, the number of congregations declined. Numerous small churches, some of them formerly pastored by women, were combined to form larger ones or allowed to die out.<sup>62</sup> Leaders who eventually founded the Grace Brethren Church and opposed ordination of women were strongly influenced by well-known fundamentalist institutions.<sup>63</sup> They tended to favor a protective philosophy of education, a dispensational theology, and all-male leadership in the Church. When the denomination divided in 1939–40 they took these ideas with them into the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches.

The so-called Ashland Brethren retained the heritage of women in ministry but, due to a generation of fundamentalist influence and the resulting lack of history to remind them of their earlier practice, the knowledge and employment of women in ministry virtually disappeared. Only with the external stimulus of the women's liberation movement of the 1970s did some individuals in the denomination become interested once more in the possibility that women might be ordained or serve as pastors.

The general pattern traced here of nineteenth-century beginnings, a peak near World War I, and a decline to virtually nothing by mid-century has also been discovered in such other free-church groups as the Baptist General Conference, the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana), the Church of the Nazarene, and the Evangelical Free Church.<sup>64</sup> The Brethren Church, from its roots in the

<sup>61</sup>E.g., Lovina Ellen Young Meyers was very active in the temperance movement, according to Holinger, *History* 701. Most of the general conferences of the Brethren in the 1890s and early twentieth century adopted resolutions opposing the beverage alcohol industry. *BE* editorialized from time to time in support of giving women the right to vote.

<sup>62</sup>Martin, "Ashland College" 38; Stoffer, *Background* 532.

<sup>63</sup>L. S. Bauman, best-known platform spokesman of the Grace Brethren, was strongly influenced by J. M. Gray, J. W. Chapman, W. G. Moorehead, and especially by R. A. Torrey and the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. Bauman was a regular contributor to *Sunday School Times* and *King's Business* (published by BIOLA) (D. D. Martin, "Bauman, Louis Sylvester," *Brethren Encyclopedia*, 1. 96–97). A. J. McClain, primary theologian among the Grace Brethren, studied with R. A. Torrey at BIOLA; taught at Philadelphia School of the Bible and BIOLA; lectured at seminaries such as Dallas, Western Conservative Baptist, Talbot and Grace; held honorary doctorates from BIOLA and Bob Jones University; and served for nine years on the *Scofield Bible* revision committee (H. A. Hoyt, "McClain, Alva J.," *Brethren Encyclopedia*, 2. 772–773).

<sup>64</sup>Cf. D. W. Dayton, *Discovering An Evangelical Heritage* (New York: Harper, 1976) 85–98, 121–141; N. Hardesty, L. S. Dayton and D. W. Dayton, "Women in the Holiness Movement: Feminism in the Evangelical Tradition," in *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. R. Ruether and E. McLaughlin; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979) 225–254; J. Hassey, *No Time for Silence: Evangelical Women in Public Ministry Around the Turn of the Century* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 57–60, 81–94.

anabaptist and pietist traditions, seems to fit the pattern rather closely. It remains for the future to record whether the Brethren made any changes in the 1980s for the ordination of women and their formal ministry in the life of the Church.