

JB and the Sisters: Women, Missions, and Money

Valerie Rempel

In 1956, a group of Mennonite Brethren women in Manitoba gathered to hear J. B. Toews preach a stirring message titled “Stellung und Dienst der Frauen nach der Schrift” (The Role and Service of Women according to the Scriptures). As he developed the theme, he worked his way from the Old Testament to the time of Jesus, and from there to the New Testament church where he quoted the infamous words of the Apostle Paul: “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet” (1 Tim 2:11–12 NIV).¹ He followed that with the familiar line (slightly abbreviated) from an 1865 poem by William Ross

JB’s leadership coincided with shifts in mission policy that significantly affected women on the mission field.

Wallace, “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.”² It was a line that JB³ used often when preaching to women, whether in German or in English.⁴ In this sermon he used it and his chosen text of Romans 16:12, as well as reference to 2 Timothy 1:5, to balance the Apostle Paul’s apparent restrictions with his appreciation for women’s great influence in the home and their unflagging support of the work of the church and its leaders.⁵ As JB put it, “The spirit of the apostolic community was nurtured in the bosom of mothers and women.”⁶

Valerie Rempel is Dean of the Biblical Seminary at Fresno Pacific University and Associate Professor, J.B. Toews Chair of History and Theology. She is active in the College Community Church Mennonite Brethren, in Clovis, California.

This last point provided an excellent segue to the fourth point of his five-point sermon where he spoke of the service of women in present-day mission work. He noted that women constituted two-thirds of Mennonite Brethren missionary personnel and acknowledged that in some mission societies three-quarters of active missionaries were women. Women were, he said, “the pillars.”⁷ And point five of this sermon to the women assembled that day? The introduction of a mission project for the Manitoba women’s mission society: funding for an x-ray machine to be used in a mission hospital overseas.

A PASSION FOR MISSIONS

The story of women in the missionary work of the Mennonite Brethren Church has not been studied in any depth. Katie Funk Wiebe included some missionary biographies in her 1979 collection, *Women Among the Brethren*. And there are several memoirs written by women who served as missionaries: Paulina Foote’s *God’s Hand Over My Nineteen Years in China* and Dorothy Louise Kopper’s *Assignment: Zaire* are two examples. Gloria Neufeld Redekop’s study of Canadian Mennonite women’s societies (which included Mennonite Brethren mission societies) and my own master’s thesis on the development and organization of women’s missionary societies among American Mennonite Brethren constitute the primary academic work done to date.⁸

Although a significant percentage of the missionary force throughout the first century of Mennonite Brethren mission activity consisted of women, research and analysis has tended to focus on evaluations of mission strategy or the cultural clashes that ensued when East met West or North met South, though not with any particular attention to the experience of women.⁹ The exception is Peter Penner’s book, *Russians, North Americans, and Telugus*, which includes a section on the experience of single women in India. This project is an attempt to begin adding to the story of women and the cause of missions.

JB was never an advocate for women in church leadership. Even late in life, he viewed women in leadership as “exceptions,” and saw the ongoing discussion among Mennonite Brethren regarding women in ministry in the last decades of the twentieth century as “an overworked subject.” But JB was still keenly aware of the contributions women made to the ministries of the church.¹⁰ He tended to view these in traditional and sentimental ways as shown in his Mother’s Day sermons which lauded women’s sacrificial service in the home, a service that would someday reap eternal rewards though it went unacknowledged on earth.¹¹ Women’s “genius” was found in “the giving of life in love and sacrifice.”¹²

JB's attitude toward the role of women reflects ideas associated with an earlier era that defined separate spheres in which men were expected to engage in the public activities of business, politics, and leadership while women engaged in the private sphere of the home, directing their attention to the physical and spiritual nurture of their families.¹³ JB lodged this perspective in his reading of New Testament church practice where, he said, man had "directive responsibility" while women had "motivating responsibility."¹⁴ In a sermon preached in three congregations over a span of three decades (Buhler, KS, in 1945, Reedley, CA, in 1953, and Dinuba, CA, in 1974), JB described women's primary role in training children, noting that "from mothers we receive the materials for the construction of our moral and spiritual nature."¹⁵ In a similar fashion, JB's tribute to his own wife, Nettie Unruh Toews, described her as "the center of the family," a position that freed him for "the arena of duty" that was the "wider North American and international community of faith."¹⁶

However, JB's view of the importance of mothers or the right ordering of leadership in the church is not what makes him especially relevant to a discussion of women, missions, and money. His sermons regarding women probably reflect widely held views not only among Mennonite Brethren but also among evangelicals in general during much of the twentieth century. Rather, it is his role as board member and as the first salaried promotional secretary for the Board of Foreign Missions that helps bring the subject into focus. JB's leadership coincided with shifts in mission policy that significantly affected women on the mission field, especially the large corps of single women who, during his tenure, made up almost one-third of all Mennonite Brethren missionaries. At the same time, his ability to tap into the financial resources of women at home highlights the way "sacrificial service" moved beyond its domestic sphere and into financial support for church institutions.

JB was only thirty-nine years old when, in 1945, he was elected to the Board of Reference and Counsel for the bi-national General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. He had just assumed the presidency of Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Three years later—by which time he was pastor of the Reedley (California) Mennonite Brethren Church—he became a member of the Board of Foreign Missions. The Board of Reference and Counsel was charged with theological leadership while the Board of Foreign Missions guided the ministry that was at the heart of the Mennonite Brethren Church. As such, these two boards represented the center of influence within the General Conference, and he would work with them for the next fifteen years.¹⁷

JB's own account of early Mennonite Brethren mission efforts notes that "from the beginning, Mennonite Brethren pursued a holistic ministry. They did not separate the preaching of the gospel from needs such as education and health care."¹⁸ This "holistic" approach to missions was, in JB's estimation, primarily a "ministry to a people" that functioned in the old colonial model of missions. Most decisions governing work on the various foreign fields were made at home by the Board of Foreign Missions. But Missionaries themselves also had a say, through field committees. On paper at least, the field committees were remarkably egalitarian. The 1936 General Conference constitution noted that "the missionaries that serve on any specific field (including both men and women) are considered to be a committee that participates in the management of the mission work by submitting its recommendations."¹⁹ This is noteworthy because women would not have served in similar leadership positions at home, either at the conference level or at the local congregational level. In India, for example, and especially in the early years of the mission, women were active in the Missionary Council, held positions on the council, and occasionally spoke on behalf of the mission.²⁰ By mid-century, however, as JB observed from his own contact with missionaries, a kind of "missionary pecking order" existed, dominated by the "older workers" while "younger missionaries and single women were relegated to secondary roles."²¹

At home, the primary arena for women's work in the church was through the local mission society. These had existed from the beginning of the Mennonite Brethren movement, both in Russia and in North America.²² Conference records in North America tell us that Mennonite Brethren women were early financial contributors to the cause of missions. The minutes of the 1881 General Conference sessions report the sum of \$499.60 received from "Women's Mission Activities."²³ Beginning with the conference minutes of 1890 there were regular reports of funds received from women's organizations and mission sales.²⁴ Women provided both cash and goods for the outfitting of missionaries and the funding of mission projects.

WOMEN'S MISSION SOCIETIES

Until mid-century, women's mission societies were local affairs, but they would eventually form district and provincial organizations. JB, then pastor of the Reedley Mennonite Brethren Church and a newly minted member of the Board of Foreign Missions, encouraged the formation of the Pacific District Women's Missionary Society in 1948 and helped shield it from criticism.²⁵ His calm encouragement proved a "comfort" to Lydia Martens, who was part of the group helping to organize the

various local groups into a district structure.²⁶ JB, in fact, not only encouraged and protected them but delivered the devotional message at their inaugural meeting at the Reedley Mennonite Brethren Church.²⁷ His frequent participation in women's mission rallies suggests an awareness of the significant financial support for mission that was channeled through various women's groups.²⁸ His first report as promotional secretary for the mission board further supports that claim. Five months into his work he reported to the board that "a very specific demand for more information, guidance, and direction comes to us also from the missionary societies and mission sewing circles of our churches. It may be well and timely that we occupy ourselves with the basic question, *how to harness the potentialities* of these missionary groups which are nearly in all of our constituent churches."²⁹ Under the heading "Questions for Consideration," he asked: "Is it advisable to consider the creation of district organizations of our women's missionary societies in order to simplify the procedure towards a unified direction of interest and work[?]"

JB's preaching characterized the missionary society as a place for women to promote spiritual life, to experience fellowship, and to create missionary motivation. His message to the women in Harvey, North Dakota, and delivered again in Enid, Oklahoma, touched on these themes as well as on the "practical aspects" of nurturing motivation for the support of missions through "sewing and [mission] sales." He encouraged women to motivate their entire families toward mission giving by observing, for example, a "butterless day" or a "meatless day," seeking to inject it into "the family philosophy." He closed that sermon with a third "practical aspect" wherein he urged women to accept a mission project, such as the support of a missionary, and charged them "to pray, to save, to give."³⁰ The missionary society was the place where women could "rise to the responsibility of united concerns" and "to new levels of Sacrifice."³¹

JB's question to the board regarding "the potentialities" of the women's missionary societies grew out of his assignment as promotional secretary for the Board of Foreign Missions. The decision to shift from pastoral ministry to a more administrative role on behalf of the board had come in the wake of his first visit to Africa. In 1952, JB sat on the presidium for the Mennonite World Conference and had meetings scheduled in Switzerland. The Board of Foreign Missions asked him to extend his travel to include a trip to the Belgian Congo.³² That work had begun in 1914 as an independent mission led by Mennonite Brethren Church members but did not gain official conference status until 1943. By 1952, thirty-two missionaries were serving there. JB was charged

with visiting the field to assist the board in developing policies that would govern this growing work.

In Africa, JB visited the Mennonite Brethren work but also spent time “visiting other missions to survey their methods of evangelism and study the indigenization of their institutions, schools and dispensaries.”³³ He was especially impressed by the work of the Sudan Interior Mission, which was “a leader in building true indigenous churches.” He came home convinced that it was time for a change in mission strategies and recommended that the board review their work in India, Africa, and South America.³⁴

GRACE UNRUH

The trip to Africa increased JB’s commitment to mission and highlighted the need for leadership to help direct the mission program. The Board of Foreign Missions responded by asking JB to serve in the newly created role of “promotional secretary.” In January 1954 he joined a staff of one existing administrator and two office workers.³⁵ His mandate, as he later recalled, was to “re-examine the theology, philosophy and practice of Mennonite Brethren missions, implement appropriate changes, and generate understanding in the constituency for the new approaches.”³⁶ The job description initially presented to the board in October 1952 seems less ambitious in its expectations for Bible conferences, the preparation of literature and missionary biographies, the scheduling of missionary visits, and assistance to young people considering foreign missions. It did, however, note that “other duties and services . . . may be agreed on.”³⁷

In hiring JB the board acquired a skilled preacher and a tireless promoter for the cause of missions. He was also eminently capable of moving beyond the promotional aspects of the position to help the board reexamine the “theology, philosophy and practice” of missions. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that he would have done anything else.

As promotional secretary, JB needed external funds for some of his own work, especially the travel to foreign fields undertaken on behalf of the mission board. Between 1955 and 1957, for example, he was in India, Africa, and South America, in addition to weeks of travel by rail or car across North America.³⁸ The issue of foreign travel was particularly sensitive. JB was aware of the potential criticism if he was perceived to be traveling on money meant for the missionaries and so he took care to recruit funds from outside the mission budget. When someone at a conference event would question the cost of travel and diversion of funds from missionaries, JB could reply that no funds were being di-

verted—all monies used for foreign travel were donated for that specific purpose.³⁹

The primary source of JB's foreign travel money was his sister-in-law, Grace Unruh. Born in 1905 near Freeman, South Dakota, Unruh was a teacher who worked in the Buhler, Kansas, school district from 1944 to 1975.⁴⁰ She never married but maintained close ties with her sister's family throughout her life. As JB wrote in his autobiography, "Grace . . . had many questions about the glowing missionary reports she had heard over the years. Her desire for an unvarnished version of the truth was such that she was willing to finance a good deal of my foreign travel in an effort to gain an accurate report."⁴¹ During JB's tenure as promotional secretary only one foreign trip, an emergency trip to Africa in the wake of the 1960 revolution in Congo, was fully funded by the mission board.

The research JB did on behalf of the board and his sister-in-law only increased his sense that it was time for a change in mission strategy. The era of colonialism was ending, and it was time for a new era in missions as well. At the General Conference sessions of 1957 the board presented a paper with "far-reaching" implications for the role of the missionary.⁴² It was time, JB wrote later, for "a new kind of missionary who would help establish indigenous churches that could assume the responsibility for evangelizing their own constituencies."⁴³ The report also laid out changes that increased the power of the board and its administrators to plan and evaluate the work.⁴⁴

REVISING MISSION POLICY

Revisions to the board's *Guiding Principles and Policies* noted that "the training of national leadership able to assume responsibility for a divine calling and assignment constitutes a very central objective for the missionary."⁴⁵ The revised *Policies* included a statement on the value of technical and professional ministries, suggesting that "to utilize every channel available for the distribution of the Gospel, missionaries must be assigned to such areas as radio, printing press, literature production, medical service . . . as well as teachers in specialized areas."⁴⁶ But the reality was a concerted effort to focus on church planting rather than services that appeared to divert from the task of evangelism. As JB observed many years later, "this radically redefined the role of the missionary from the understanding that it was a lifetime assignment to a specific place and people."⁴⁷ Under the new policy, missionaries would serve in a field for only as long as it took to establish a viable church and indigenous leaders who could take on the task of evangelizing their

own people. Medical and educational ministries (aside from leadership development) would be curtailed.

Women were especially represented in these earlier “holistic” ministries, serving as teachers and medical personnel. In this, Mennonite Brethren mission efforts echoed the approach of most Protestant mission work. In the face of great need, Protestant missionaries had frequently established medical clinics and schools. These were tangible needs that the missionaries could meet and their service in these areas was frequently better received than strictly evangelistic efforts. Furthermore, as women moved into active participation in the mission efforts of the nineteenth century, they justified their participation under the umbrella of “women’s work for women.” In many cultures it was inappropriate for men to relate to women outside of family relationships. Female missionaries had easier access to the communities of women and children and were best suited to work with their spiritual and physical needs.

From the beginning, Mennonite Brethren had blessed single women for missionary service. When the first policy handbook was published in 1947, it noted that “the mission fields offer fine opportunities to single ladies.” Single men were a different story. It was “best that they marry” before going to a foreign field.⁴⁸ Significantly, single missionaries were paid half the salary married couples were paid, meaning that each missionary—single or married, male or female—was paid the same allowance.⁴⁹ Throughout the General Conference, the calling of women for missionary service was recognized through the practice of ordination. This ended, however, during the 1950s in the wake of discussions regarding authority and leadership in the church.⁵⁰ From then on, women were “commissioned” rather than ordained.⁵¹

The *Missionary Album* produced in 1963 offered brief biographies of missionaries who had served between 1889 and 1963 in either the Mennonite Brethren or Krimmer Mennonite Brethren work. It bears witness to the sizeable number of women who answered the call to missions. Of the 283 names listed, 187 are women. Of those, 71 were single women at the time.⁵² Fully 66 percent of the missionaries listed are women. In 1957, the year that JB and the board began to signal to the General Conference that change was in the air, 62 percent of missionaries were women. Single women made up 27 percent of missionary staff.

In some fields, women far outnumbered their male counterparts. This was especially true in the oldest fields where schools and medical services had long existed. In India, for example, there were more single women than married women, and together they far outnumbered men. In his 1957 trip to India, JB even met privately with the single missionaries

as a group, a move criticized by the male-led Missionary Council who presumably could not control the agenda.⁵³

What is especially interesting about the efforts to overhaul the direction of Mennonite Brethren mission work in the late 1950s and after is the effect of these changes on the corps of single women who were strongly represented in the kinds of mission work that had been so important in the earlier era. Over the two decades that followed, the number of single women working as missionaries declined significantly. Where single women had been 27 percent of the missionary staff in 1957, twenty years later they made up only 16 percent.

CONCLUSION

This drop in the presence of single women on the mission field is not unique to the Mennonite Brethren. R. Pierce Beaver's 1980 revision of his 1968 book, *American Protestant Women in World Mission*, pointed to the possibility of apathy toward mission, distrust in the "rightness of sending missionaries abroad to seek the conversion of other peoples," and the increased opportunities available in nonchurch agencies as possible factors contributing to the decline.⁵⁴ For Beaver, however, it was the fading of "a distinctive women's missionary movement carried out through women's agencies" that was most responsible for the decline.⁵⁵ Mennonite Brethren women, of course, never ran an independent mission agency. They worked through the local church and felt loyal to the united work of the conference. It is true that in the last decades of the twentieth century the women's missionary movement suffered a significant decrease in membership, but during the period of shift in mission policy, women's mission groups were very active, at the district and provincial level as well as locally. Indeed, one comment received at the 1972 General Conference sessions criticized the board for their work with the women's groups: "Why is the Board satisfied to work primarily through WMS with the constituent churches? Why could not men be acknowledged and utilized in promoting missions? I view the traditional approach through the 'women' as a 'copout'—a strong missions committee might be better."⁵⁶

More recently, Dana L. Robert has pointed to the rise of the women's movement as a potential factor in the decline. With career opportunities growing in the sending culture, it may be that women found it easier to create meaningful careers at home. In either case both Beaver and Robert point to the need for continued exploration of this shifting pattern.

I am unaware, however, of any analysis of how the changing mission strategy put into place by the Mennonite Brethren Board of Foreign Missions affected the work in which single women were most engaged.

As a strategy, church planting is more easily associated with married couples who can work together in offering hospitality, establishing Bible studies, training leaders, and nurturing a new congregation. When the board began to reduce educational programs in Africa, close dispensaries in India, or curtail orphanage work in Brazil, they inadvertently made it more difficult for single women to find placements on foreign fields. Furthermore, in reducing the number of single women working in any given region, they may have limited the sense of shared sisterhood in the work. To be clear, the board was not trying to eliminate single women from the mission corps. It was an unintended consequence of the mission strategies that JB, the board, and successive secretaries and boards put into place during this period.

POSTSCRIPT

The impetus for this article was the inauguration of the J. B. Toews Chair in History and Theology at Fresno Pacific University Biblical Seminary. It seemed especially important to acknowledge Grace Unruh, who was a faithful contributor to so many of JB's projects, first during his tenure with the Board of Foreign Missions, then later at the seminary, and again in his role as founding Director of the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies. Her entire estate was left to establish the Grace Unruh Endowment, whose sole beneficiary is the J. B. Toews Chair. Though other funds have also been gratefully received, Unruh's initial endowment of nearly a quarter million dollars is the largest single gift supporting the chair.

In leaving her estate to an institution of the church, Unruh was like many other women. The financial records of the mission board have long lists of single women and widows who left property or cash gifts to missions.⁵⁷ These, too, have been mostly unacknowledged though they must certainly fall into JB's category of "sacrificial service."

JB was very aware of the importance of the "sisters" in the work of the Mennonite Brethren church. While reluctant to bless them in pastoral leadership, he nevertheless advocated for them in their work on the mission field, supported their need for pensions at home,⁵⁸ and, as always, looked to them to "to pray, to save, and to give." At home and on the mission field, they did. We should be grateful. ✨

NOTES

1. See sermon outline, "Stellung und Dienst der Frauen nach der Schrift", Sermons to Women's Missionary Societies, J. B. Toews Papers, Mennonite Library and Archives, Fresno, Calif. (Hereafter, Toews Papers). See also the

- English version of this sermon, “Women in the Mission Program of God.”
2. The complete line is, “the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world.” Toews does not reference the poem’s author but uses the line as one would a familiar proverb. See the complete text of “The Hand that Rocks the Cradle is the Hand that Rules the World” at <http://www.potw.org/archive/potw391.html>, accessed September 1, 2013.
 3. As has been common in Mennonite Brethren circles, I have chosen to refer to J. B. Toews by his initials rather than his last name, as is more common in formal writing. As Wally Kroeker noted in his foreword to Toews’s autobiography, “the shorthand of initials was common in earlier times where biblical names like Abraham, Jacob, John and Peter would cover most of the men in a Russian Mennonite village. Initials like AH, BB, JJ, JA and HH were a kind of conference code that brought instant recognition. J. B. Toews is one of those. Throughout the Mennonite Brethren Conference he is affectionately known as, simply, JB. There’s no confusing him with anyone else because he’s one of a kind.” *JB: The Autobiography of a Twentieth Century Mennonite Pilgrim* (Fresno, CA: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1995), viii.
 4. See Sermons—Mother’s Day, and Sermons to Women’s Missionary Societies, Toews Papers.
 5. New Testament texts referenced include Romans 16:12–13 and 2 Timothy 1:5.
 6. “Women in the Mission Program of God,” sermon outline, Sermons to Women’s Missionary Societies, Toews Papers.
 7. Ibid.
 8. See Katie Funk Wiebe, ed., *Women Among the Brethren: Stories of 15 Mennonite Brethren and Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Women* (Board of Christian Literature, 1975); Gloria L. Neufeld Redekop, *The Work of Their Hands: Mennonite Women’s Societies in Canada*, Studies in Women and Religion v.2 (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996); and Valerie G. Rempel, ““She Hath Done What She Could”: the Development of the Women’s Missionary Services in the Mennonite Brethren Churches of the United States” (MA thesis, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, 1996). For Mennonite Brethren missionary memoirs, see Paulina Foote, *God’s Hand Over my Nineteen Years in China* (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1962); Viola Berthold Wiebe and Marilyn Wiebe Dodge, *Sepia Prints: Memoirs of a Missionary in India* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred, 1990); and Dorothy Louise Kopper, *Assignment: Zaire* (Bakersfield, CA: Nlemvo Publishing, 1997).
 9. See, for example, Peter Penner, *Russians, North Americans and Telugu: the Mennonite Brethren Mission in India, 1885–1975* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred, 1997); Hartwig Eitzen, “Dependent, Independent, Interdependent? A Case Study in Mission Partnership Between North and South America” (PhD diss., Trinity International University, 2003); Hans Kasdorf, “A Century of Mennonite Brethren Mission Thinking, 1885–1984” (ThD thesis, University of South Africa, 1986). A variety of case studies as well as a collection of MA and PhD theses also exist.

10. Handwritten journal entry dated June 13, [1993] in response to an Adult Education presentation, “Women in Leadership,” given by Ray Bystrom at College Community Church Mennonite Brethren, Clovis, California. JB described the topic as “overworked” and the “one-sided emphasis” as “destructive.” “Every rule or general practice has an exception. Are we generalizing and overemphasizing the leadership status of women?” “Musings,” 1993–1997, notebook, Toews Papers.
11. See Sermons—Mother’s Day, Toews Papers.
12. “Christian Womanhood in our Modern Day, Matt. 10:39,” Sermons to Women’s Missionary Societies, Toews Papers. JB attributes the quote to [Alphonse de] Lamartine.
13. There is an extensive literature around nineteenth-century gender roles. See especially Barbara Welter’s seminal article, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1966): 151–74.
14. “Women in the Mission Program of God,” undated, handwritten sermon outline, Sermons—Mothers/Women, Toews Papers. See also JB’s smaller collection of Father’s Day sermons, which note men’s role in public affairs and even their primary role in evangelism, and contrast to his Mother’s Day sermons.
15. “A Mother’s Charge, Ex. 2:9,” Sermons—Mother’s Day, Toews Papers.
16. Toews, *Autobiography*, 157.
17. *Ibid.*, 143.
18. J. B. Toews, *A Pilgrimage of Faith: the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia and North America, 1860–1990* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred, 1993), 91.
19. *Ibid.*, 92.
20. Penner, *Russians, North Americans, and Telugus*, x.
21. Toews, *Autobiography*, 160. See also Peter Penner’s account of the Missionary Council at mid-century and the difficulty faced by single women in that setting, in *Russians, North Americans and Telugus*, 219–37. JB had met with single missionary women in India during his trip in 1957 and, as he noted in his autobiography, traveled extensively with missionaries on deputation visits.
22. See my account of early Mennonite Brethren Mission Societies in “She Hath Done What She Could.”
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. See my account of the letter directed to JB regarding the formation of the group and his response in “She Hath Done What She Could,” 40–42.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. See Sermons to Women’s Missionary Societies, Toews Papers.
29. “April 21, 1954 Report to the Board of Foreign Missions on the Promotional Phase of the Administration,” A250, MB Missions/Services, box 18, Mennonite Library & Archives, Fresno, California. (Hereafter MB Missions Records). Emphasis mine.
30. “Mission Society, 2 Timothy 1:3–5,” undated sermon preached at Harvey [N.D.] and Enid [Okla.], Sermons to Women’s Missionary Societies, Toews

- Papers.
31. "Christian Womanhood in Our Modern Day," Toews Papers.
 32. "Minutes of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America," April 2–4, 1952, MB Missions Records. See also Toews, *Autobiography*, 159–65.
 33. Toews, *Autobiography*, 153.
 34. Ibid.
 35. Ibid., 159.
 36. Ibid.
 37. "Promotional Program of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Conference of Mennonite Brethren Church of N.A.," Agenda of the Board of Foreign Missions Mennonite Brethren Conference, October 14–17, 1952, MB Missions Records.
 38. Toews, *Autobiography*, 160.
 39. *Year Book of the 47th General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America Held at the Mennonite Brethren Church, Yarrow, B.C., October 20–23, 1957* (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, n.d.). See also Toews, *Autobiography*, 161.
 40. "Unruh, Grace," Obituaries, *The Christian Leader*, 13 May 1986, 22.
 41. Toews, *Autobiography*, 161.
 42. See "Statement of the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church on the Effects of the Changes of Our Age on the World-Wide Missionary Assignment," *Year Book of the 47th General Conference*, 41–43.
 43. Toews, *Pilgrimage of Faith*, 263. See "Statement of the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church on the Effects of the Changes of Our Age on the World-Wide Missionary Assignment," *Year Book of the 47th General Conference*, 41–43.
 44. Ibid.
 45. "Explanatory Introduction to the Mennonite Brethren Church Board of Foreign Missions Principles and Policies," in *Year Book, Centennial Conference and 48th Session of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America Held at the Mennonite Brethren Church, Reedley, California, November 12–16, 1960* (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, n.d.), 78.
 46. Ibid.
 47. Toews, *Pilgrimage of Faith*, 263–64.
 48. *Foreign Mission Guiding Principles and Field Policies* (Hillsboro, KS: Board of Foreign Missions, [1947]), 10, Record Group 250.
 49. Penner makes this point in *Russians, North Americans and Telugus*, x.
 50. Penner's account of the shifting role of single women in the Missionary Council in India offers an interesting parallel. He suggests that in an earlier era, women had a stronger voice on the Council, even holding positions and speaking for the Conference. During the 1950s, however, women felt increasingly shut out of decision-making. See especially pp. 88, 121, 162–66, and 195–218 in *Russians, North Americans and Telugus*. See also JB's reflections in *Autobiography*, 160, 165.
 51. See especially Doug Heidebrecht's account of this shift in "Contextualiz-

- ing Community Hermeneutics: Mennonite Brethren and Women in Church Leadership” (PhD diss., University of Wales, 2013), 46–60.
52. *Missionary Album 1889–1963* (Hillsboro, KS: Board of Missions of the Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church, 1963).
 53. Penner interview with J. B. Toews, cited in *Russians, North Americans and Telugus*, 209.
 54. R. Pierce Beaver, *American Protestant Women in World Mission*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 201.
 55. *Ibid.*, 202.
 56. Exhibit 5-1, “Minutes, Board of Missions/Services Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America, Hillsboro, Kansas, February 19–22, 1973,” MB Missions Records.
 57. This is an area that needs additional research. A preliminary review of archival records reveals numerous estate gifts from single women and widows to the cause of missions.
 58. See, for example, J. B. Toews to Vernon Wiebe, 8 January 1973, subject files: Toews, J. B., 1973–81, MB Missions Records.