

A Brief Moment in Time: Informal Leadership and Shared Authority Among Sixteenth Century Anabaptist Women

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Introduction

Popular Christian writer Sue Monk Kidd, in her recent book, *Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, notes two historical traditions regarding women. She states:

For a while these two traditions—the revolutionary and the patriarchal—clashed, but soon the revolutionary tradition was stamped out ... For a brief moment in history, a window of opportunity to reverse patriarchy opened, and then it ... shut [again].¹

Many scholars have found evidence for these two traditions, the revolutionary and the patriarchal, the former a period of time in the history of the church when women participated more actively and visibly, and, the latter, a time when the structures of the church became restrictive excluding all women from extensive participation. The well known sociologist, Max Weber articulated this classical interpretation already in the 1920s in regard to women's involvements in

religious movements in general and the Anabaptist/Mennonite historian Harold S. Bender expressed it in 1959 in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* in the following way:

In the early Anabaptist movement women played an important role.... Later, after the creative period of Anabaptism was past, the settled communities and congregations reverted more to the typical patriarchal attitude of European culture.²

This cycle of participation evident for women in each of the regions of continental Europe where Anabaptism took root in the sixteenth century, coincides with developments in all major religious movements from early Christianity onward. Historians writing about the first century Christian Church, monasticism, the Beguines, medieval heretical movements such as the Cathars and Waldensians, Pietism, Quakerism, Methodism, the Holiness movement and the more recent experiences of Canadian religious women, all have recognized different phases of participation by women in religious movements.³ Also in the recent work of feminist historians like Susan Juster and Pyhllis Mack, this interpretation forms the basis of their theoretical framework.⁴

With the recent publication of the book *Profiles of Anabaptist Women Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers*, containing narratives on over 50 Anabaptist women in 31 different chapters, grounded in the source material of the court records with some of the first translations of the latter into English, we are now better informed about the significance of Anabaptist women and the many activities by which they ensured the survival of the movement. The different phases in Anabaptist women's participation is an important underlying theme in this book, as in much of the research done on Anabaptist women to date.⁵ All of this work indicates that the claims of feminist historian Joyce Irwin and the prominent Anabaptist social historian Claus-Peter Clasen are no longer valid. Writing in 1979 when the field of Women's History was just beginning, Irwin stated that women did not have important roles until the Quaker movement of the seventeenth century.⁶ Unfortunately Irwin did not base her assumption on the Anabaptist court records (Täuferakten) which Roland Bainton had pointed to as a possible source for the study of Anabaptist women; she relied instead on the writings of Anabaptist male leaders. Clasen, who like Irwin was not a Mennonite, initiated a new era in Anabaptist history writing, a history 'from the bottom up,' and read more documents on Anabaptists than any historian of his time.⁷ Despite his extensive use of the court records he did not find the role of Anabaptist women significant, stating, "the sect showed no inclination to grant women a greater role than they customarily had in sixteenth-century society."⁸ However, his research was substantial—the only statistics on Anabaptists that we have—and focussed on the different phases of the Anabaptist movement. Unwittingly, Clasen in his work provides us with a full-blown interpretation of Weber's hypothesis concerning Anabaptist women's participation and therefore can be used as a starting point in the systematic and detailed study of Anabaptist women's history, to analyse "the creative period of Anabaptism" as Harold Bender called it. There are of course a number of reasons for the

variation in Anabaptist women's participation, some of which will come to light in the following discussion.

The singular challenge to the interpretation that Anabaptist women's activities changed as the movement developed has come from Sigrun Haude, who was present in 1995 at the first conference on the history of women in Anabaptist traditions held in Millersville, Pennsylvania. Haude commented there on some of the presentations about sixteenth century Anabaptist women. In 1998 her own essay on the topic was published in which she states that "dividing the history of Anabaptist women into two phases—an early, unorganized one, and a later more institutionalized period—is neither helpful nor generally applicable." According to Haude "Incidents of preaching and teaching by women occurred during all periods, and women could always be found as central figures in congregations."⁹

Haude illustrates her thesis with citations of women leaders from the court records of Bavaria, Hessen, Elsass, Baden and the Pfalz and brings to light a number of Anabaptist women about whom we previously had not heard. But she uses the court records selectively and her individual citations, in my view, do not reject the variation in the participation of Anabaptist women over time which has been demonstrated in the systematic studies of court records for particular regions. Secondly, Haude makes no mention of women in the Swiss and Austrian regions of the south or women in the German and Dutch regions of the north. Furthermore, the multiple origins of Anabaptism require that the question of different phases be answered individually for each of the geographic regions where the movement was established.¹⁰ Her statement that Anabaptism's continued persecution caused women to remain "essential and much needed" in sustaining the movement is certainly valid for Anabaptists, as it had been for earlier heretical movements such as the Waldensians.¹¹ However, the persecution was part of the larger dynamic of renewed Christian experiences—such as described in Helena von Freyberg's spiritual autobiography—and of sect/church formation, during which distinct phases of participation by women are evident.¹² The role of women was crucial in establishing the movement. But as James Stayer recently pointed out, the moment came when "the radicals themselves stopped demanding that things must become totally other and started reaching out for accommodations with the world around them."¹³ At a certain point in time the Anabaptists 'moved on' toward greater accommodation with society and the formation of their own institutions, which, like those of the society around them were patriarchal.

In this paper then I will assume, as have so many other historians, that indeed there were different phases of participation for Anabaptist women and that in the revolutionary, decentralized and pre-institutional phase of Anabaptism women had more opportunities for leadership than they had later when the informal, charismatic and lay leadership style of Anabaptism had passed. Radical action and increased opportunities changed over time for all Anabaptists, whether male or female, and eventually only men, certain men that is, acted as Anabaptist

leaders. In this essay the primary focus will be on women leaders and their activities in the first phase of the Anabaptist movement. As Arnold Snyder has said: "Future studies need to focus much more on the area of the 'informal' leadership of Anabaptist women....Concentrating only on the later stages, or access of women to the 'official' leadership offices—while it is a pressing question currently—misses a crucial and dynamic dimension in the story of Anabaptist women."¹⁴ The published biographies in the *Profiles of Anabaptist Women* book provide some information about early Anabaptist female leaders in Europe and I will discuss them first. However, the main focus of my discussion will be the early women leaders in the Austrian territory of Tirol where Anabaptism was very strong and threatened to become the major religion of the people.¹⁵ Most of their cases were not discussed in the *Profiles of Anabaptist Women*. There is convincing evidence that for a brief moment in time at the beginning of the Anabaptist movement women took the opportunity to share authority with men in various forms of mutual, alternating and interdependent leadership. A few words about the revolutionary 'setting' which gave Anabaptist women a 'window of opportunity,' about defining Anabaptist leadership and about the court records as a source will set the stage for this discussion.

Martin Luther initiated a revolution in 1517 that began a time of upheaval—"Umbruch" as it is called in German. It threatened to break up all basic societal structures. The printing press aided in dispersing Luther's ideas. The first major social impact of Luther's ideas on the lower classes expressed itself in the Peasants' War of 1525 and 1526. These armed revolts were suppressed, in some cases brutally. But the protest they brought to light was not easily suppressed. In the wake of the unsuccessful Peasants' War the Anabaptist movement flourished. The revolution or Reformation continued when a group of reformers went further than either Martin Luther or Ulrich Zwingli had anticipated and instituted adult baptism in Zurich in 1525. Now both state and church, whether Protestant or Catholic, reacted to what they viewed as a Radical Reformation. By 1527 Felix Mantz had suffered a martyr's death in Zurich and later that year Archduke Ferdinand I, ruler of the Austrian territories, issued a general mandate against all Protestants and Anabaptists. As a staunch Catholic and defender of the 'one Christian Church,' Ferdinand I was determined to eradicate, by every possible means, the sect disparagingly referred to as Anabaptism which was rapidly taking hold in his territories as it already had in the Swiss confederacy.¹⁶ In 1529, when Ferdinand's brother Charles V, ruler of the Holy Roman Empire, instituted the death penalty for Anabaptists throughout his domains, their persecution was brought to its ultimate severity.¹⁷ But, as the following discussion will illustrate, by 1529 the first phase of Anabaptism had already come to an end in regions like Tirol. The historians Anderson and Zinsser put it this way. "In the sixteenth century the women of the Anabaptists first discovered what women of the other Protestant sects would soon learn: that these new Christian sects welcomed their enthusiasm and their zealous efforts, but only in the early

days. Already in 1529, one of the Anabaptist leaders opposed women teaching or preaching ..."¹⁸

In the crisis of the Peasants' War and the persecution which followed it, every person who joined the Anabaptist movement was needed, regardless of sex or class.¹⁹ At a time when the authorities could be knocking on the door of one's house at any moment to arrest all members of the household and, when anyone suspected of attending Anabaptist meetings, of harbouring Anabaptists, of sympathizing with them or aiding them in any way, was held accountable by the authorities, gender roles—what women and men individually should do in the movement—was not a matter of discussion. If Anabaptism was to survive at all, official and appointed leadership had to take second place to personal initiative and spontaneous, inspired action. Here was a "window of opportunity" for women, an unplanned reversion of the patriarchal order for a short time. The strategy of the authorities primarily was to punish the leaders first in the hope that eliminating them would weaken the movement. A mandate from Ferdinand I in the spring of 1528 illustrates the point. He sought to maintain the Christian order by instructing local governments to punish severely all those who baptized, preached, read forbidden books to others, gave communion, held meetings, or persuaded people to join the outlawed movement.²⁰ In the end this government policy failed. Anabaptism survived as a grass roots movement not only because women made up close to half of the membership in some areas but also because they took on leadership roles, giving Anabaptism a unique strength.²¹

What was there about Anabaptist leadership that encouraged women to become leaders in this time of crisis? Theoretically, everyone in the Anabaptist movement could take on clerical functions. The Anabaptists took Luther's idea of the priesthood of all believers seriously, even though they seldom used the phrase.²² Lay leadership was informal rather than formal or official in nature and consisted of public activities by non-professional, for the most part, non-educated men and women.²³ Their activities included teaching, preaching, prophesying, proselytization, holding meetings, hosting Anabaptists, and leading house churches. Lay leaders were not necessarily appointed by an Anabaptist group as a whole. Rather, they claimed to receive their authority directly from God. An appeal to the power of the Holy Spirit characterized their work; as Arnold Snyder says, they were "Spirit-elected" leaders.²⁴ Max Weber aptly describes how the charismatic, self appointed leader functioned:

Charisma knows only inner determination and inner restraint. The holder of charisma seizes the task that is adequate for him and demands obedience and a following by virtue of his mission. His success determines whether he finds them. His charismatic claim breaks down if his mission is not recognized by those to whom he feels he has been sent. If they recognize him, he is their master—so long as he knows how to maintain recognition through 'proving' himself. But he does not derive his 'right' from their will, in the manner of an election. Rather, the reverse holds: it is the duty of those to whom he addresses his mission to recognize him as their charismatically qualified leader.²⁵

Weber speaks of charismatic leaders as men, but, the call of the Holy Spirit was not gender specific; it was the basis of authority for the speech and actions of both women and men in the Anabaptist movement. Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin state that, "It is characteristic of the leadership roles in Christianity claimed by women that they derive their authority from personal charisma rather than from office."²⁶ Anabaptist women were no exception to this pattern. It was precisely the unofficial character of the activities in the newly developing Anabaptist movement, where formal structures were at first minimal, that gave women their authority along with men.²⁷ Moreover, the fact that the Anabaptist movement was based in the home, the private sphere and 'domain' of the woman, further facilitated the women's participation as members and charismatic leaders. Two primary conditions then made it possible for women to be leaders in the Anabaptist movement, the informal, less structured and lay nature of the movement and the emphasis on charisma or inspiration in the early years of its development. There is evidence for both lay and inspired leadership in the sources.

According to the laws of the sixteenth century, women were required to testify on their own behalf in criminal procedures.²⁸ Since Anabaptism was outlawed early on, the formal persecution of its members, women and men alike, provides a rich source of information to the historian of our time in the form of court records and government reports which contain evidence of their arrest and activities. The advantage of these sources for Anabaptist women's history is that they allow us to study the activities of women from testimonies they gave to the authorities which were recorded as they spoke. From this documentation by court secretaries and the reports of government officials based on these notations we can study what women actually did, not just what they were told or expected to do. These records are essentially an 'outsider's view' of Anabaptism. They do not contain words like apostle, minister or prophet. This may have been the language within the Anabaptist community, but the government—not entirely sure that the peasants would not revolt again—used words like rebels, agitators and instigators [Aufrührer, Anfänger, Verursacher, Verführer] as well as leader and key leader [Vorsteher, Prinzipal Vorsteher] in identifying Anabaptist leaders.²⁹ Women who took on leadership roles not only challenged the expectations for women of that time but also presented a greater threat to society than men in such positions. A woman's choice to be rebaptized and proselytize was more likely to lead to the breakup of the family and cause children to become wards of the state. In the context of a patriarchal society where the public speech and action of women was limited, the participation of women in leadership threatened a reversal of the established order and motivated government authorities even more to document women's involvements as a means to discredit this heretical movement called Anabaptism. This may be why we have extensive references to women in the court records. Many more women are named in these records than in traditional Anabaptist sources like the *Martyrs' Mirror* which already included a high percentage of women—thirty-three

percent. Writing in 1963, the historian Claus Peter Clasen stated: "We are better informed about the outlawed Anabaptist sect than any other religious movement of the sixteenth century....the wealth of Anabaptist material permits us to study many problems to which the material on the Lutheran movement does not lend itself."³⁰

Martin Luther "...criticized girls and women for trying to speak eloquently in any context: 'It suits them much better to stammer or to speak badly.'"³¹ Arrest and interrogation required Anabaptist women to take on a public role that certainly may have been new to them but at which they proved quite capable. In the patriarchal culture of that time, public declarations of faith and spontaneous leadership by women were indeed unusual which in part explains Luther's comment. It also explains in part why "Calvin, like Luther, believed unequivocally that women could not perform any tasks of the ministry." Calvin feared the ridicule of the Anabaptists who he said would "scoff to see us run by women!"³² For Luther and Calvin, who viewed women leaders as a total reversal of the social order, Anabaptists had become too revolutionary. The Protestant reformers could not envision a mutual, interdependent and shared authority between male and female leaders as we see it in the book, *Profiles of Anabaptist Women*, and the Anabaptist court records from the Austrian territory of Tirol.

The Profiles of Anabaptist Women book

Right from the beginning of Anabaptism, women were integrally involved in the outlawed movement as lay leaders. The first adult baptisms took place in January, 1525 in Zurich, Switzerland, near the cathedral, in the home of Felix Mantz's mother. She took the risk of allowing this meeting to take place in her home "where as many as fifteen people may have been present."³³ Her son would soon become the first Swiss Anabaptist martyr. Agnes Linck von Biel was another Swiss woman not afraid to take risks. She insisted on purchasing a New Testament without a preface and without pictures of saints. The former she considered heretical and the latter idolatrous. At her arrest in 1528 she had been baptized already for several years.³⁴ Margaret Hottinger was one of several leaders in her family. She was the only woman arrested when the Swiss authorities made an attempt to curtail key Anabaptist leaders in 1525. "The list of prisoners sentenced on November 18 reads like an early Anabaptist 'who's who': Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz, George Blaurock, Michael Sattler, Ulrich Teck, Martin Linck, and Margaret Hottinger."³⁵ After six months in prison Margaret recanted, only to travel to neighbouring St. Gall where she "forgave and absolved the sins of those praying...." and preached the word of God. Margaret was a "charismatic and prophetic young woman who exercised considerable influence among the early Swiss Anabaptists."³⁶ But the turning point for women's participation was not long in coming in the Swiss Anabaptist movement. Just two years after the first baptisms had taken place, the "window

of opportunity” closed for Swiss women. In 1527 the Schleithem Articles were approved which restricted women’s involvements. As Arnold Snyder explains:

...the same general pattern would be repeated over a longer span of time elsewhere in the Anabaptist movement, for the same basic reasons: direct spiritual revelations and pneumatic manifestations came under suspicion, and were replaced by the revelation of written scripture, interpreted by a male leadership.³⁷

The turning points marking a shift in women’s participation were at times explicit as with the decisions made at Schleithem, at times more subtle.

Another early involvement of Anabaptist women took place in France. In the city of Strasbourg close to half of the seventeen or eighteen prophets active in the in community led by Melchior Hoffman were women.³⁸ One of the most prominent was Ursula Jost, who, influenced by the Peasants’ War, recorded what the Holy Spirit had revealed to her between 1524 and 1530, the early years of Anabaptism in this region. Her visions and prophecies were published by Melchior Hoffman and proved quite popular in North Germany and Holland. Hoffman “...saw women’s prophesying as connected with the new thing that God was beginning to do in history.”³⁹ Barbara Rebstock also prophesied in Strasbourg and was “counted as an ‘elder of Israel’ ” early on in the movement. A number of years later, when David Joris, a leader from the North visiting the city challenged Barbara’s authority, the male leaders of Strasbourg ardently defended her pastoral role.⁴⁰ Margarethe Prüss was not an Anabaptist prophet but brought her radical views to light in the early years of Anabaptism in Strasbourg via the printing press. She married three different printers sequentially in order to retain the family print shop which allowed her to have a leading role in disseminating Anabaptist writings. The Prüss Beck press published Ursula Jost’s book of prophecies.⁴¹

In Augsburg the early, dynamic period of Anabaptism occurred between August 1527 and April 1528. Many ordinary women promoted and sustained the movement by housing and feeding Anabaptist refugees, hosting meetings in their homes and distributing material goods or alms to needy members. Barbara Schleiffer was a grocer by trade in Augsburg. John Oyer says of her: “She never led the Anabaptists in any formal or official manner. She did lead in the form of inviting them constantly into her home, obviously encouraging them.”⁴² Much later, in the 1540s, Helena von Freyberg, the noblewoman from Tirol living in exile in Augsburg, wrote a confession of sin, addressed to fellow believers and two male leaders in particular. It is the only piece of writing we have from her. One has to ask the question, why did she write it out? Had the “window of opportunity” closed in Augsburg for lay leaders like Helena? Was she conforming to the Anabaptist ‘order’ being instituted by Pilgrim Marpeck at this time? If the sin Helena was writing about concerned the recantation she had made to the authorities in Tirol, perhaps her confession is another example of Marpeck “counselling his fellow Anabaptists on how to avoid giving offense to the government.”⁴³

In Northern Germany and Holland, Anabaptist women leaders like Fenneke van Geelen (1535) and Anna Janz (1530s) paid with their lives for their activities.⁴⁴ One of the turning points for Anabaptist women in the North came during the Anabaptist takeover of the city of Münster. In the midst of the siege, Hille Feicken experienced a call from God to lead fellow Anabaptists to victory in the manner of the biblical Judith. Her actions reveal the integral involvement of women in the Anabaptist struggle to retain control of the city. But, following her failed attempt to assassinate the Bishop of Münster, polygamy was instituted, in all likelihood to control the women, who outnumbered men in the city two to one. Queen Divara may have been the favourite among Jan van Leyden's sixteen wives but she did not exercise political power in the Kingdom of Münster. In contrast to Elisabeth Wandscherer, another of the king's wives who was brutally executed, Divara was "an accomodating wife."⁴⁵

In the wake of the Anabaptist defeat in Münster, the man from whom subsequent generations of Anabaptists took the name Mennonite, Menno Simons, became a key leader. He ministered to the widely scattered believers and redefined Anabaptism in the northern regions of Europe.⁴⁶ Menno Simons instructed women to "Be obedient to your husbands in all reasonable things so that those who do not believe may be gained by your upright, pious conversation without the Word, as Peter says."⁴⁷ Although Menno Simons did not forbid women to teach, preach or minister to others, Lucille Marr has pointed out that he did advise wives to stay at home.⁴⁸ The active role of Elisabeth Dirks, in teaching and deacon work—she was mistaken for Menno Simons' wife at her arrest—may indicate that single women found it easier than did married women to take on public roles during the years of Menno Simons' leadership.⁴⁹ In a more recent article Beth Kreitzer discusses Menno Simons' views on the Old Testament book Song of Songs concluding that: "As socially conservative as Menno may have been, his devotion to what he saw as Christian truth could lead him to ambiguous positions on such issues as the proper role for the pious Christian woman in society."⁵⁰ Perhaps the deacon work of women in the New Testament provided a model for Elisabeth Dirks which did not challenge Menno Simons' literal approach to the Bible.⁵¹

In short, strong evidence exists that women exercised considerable leadership during the early years in each of the different Anabaptist groups—in Switzerland, Strasbourg, Augsburg, Northern Germany and Holland. The biographies published in *Profiles of Anabaptist Women* challenge the views of Claus-Peter Clasen who, despite his prolific research on the various phases of Anabaptism, maintained that women did not hold important roles in the movement, and to Sigrun Haude, who more recently has claimed that dividing the movement into different phases does not serve the historian of Anabaptist women's history well. The cases of early female leaders in the Austrian territory of Tirol will provide further evidence for this. Helena von Freyberg, Elisabeth von Wolkenstein and Anna Egger, whose stories are in this book, were not the only women active as leaders in Tirol.

Anabaptist Women Lay Leaders in Tirol

In the Austrian territory of Tirol ruled by Archduke Ferdinand I, the peasant revolts of 1525 and 1526 expressed lower class ambitions to put Luther's Reformation ideas into practice. Ferdinand defeated the peasant armies which Michael Gaismair led over the mountains of this Austrian region. But he found it much more difficult to contain the growth of the Anabaptist movement which continued the social, political and religious protest in a less militaristic yet very active form. Links between the peasant uprising and the Anabaptist movement existed for women as well as men. Anna Gasser's story is a case in point. Her name appeared along with her husband's on several lists of Gaismair supporters, a fact which incriminated her even more once it was known that she was also an Anabaptist.⁵² The Gassers belonged to the class of peasant farmers—common people—not the poorest in this region but not wealthy. The support which certain upper class families gave to the Anabaptist movement early on speaks for the resonance which Anabaptist ideas found among people of varying social status. The Anabaptist emphasis on lay participation—that everyone potentially was a priest, the need for every member's full involvement in a time of crisis and the Anabaptist focus on the New Testament with its emphasis on the spiritual equality of all believers were among the factors motivating women in Tirol to become leaders in the early years of the movement, whether they were married, single, young, old or wealthy.

In 1975, three years after the publication of his book, Claus-Peter Clasen wrote an article specifically about Anabaptist leaders. It consisted of a brief discussion and long lists of names of Anabaptist leaders in the southern regions—Switzerland, South and Central Germany and Austria. From this information it is quite clear that in Tirol, as was the case in other Anabaptist regions, the number of leaders, whether male or female, decreased over time and was highest in the early years of the movement. By 1529, four years after the first baptisms had taken place in Zurich, Tirol had 45 new Anabaptist leaders and another 45 in the second phase between 1530 and 1549. On the other hand, in Swiss regions, the number of leaders up to 1529 was 72 and after that decreased by almost fifty percent to 37.⁵³ The differences in these figures point to the different phases of development in Swiss and Austrian regions. In the Swiss Confederacy, as mentioned above, the shift came with the Schleithem Articles of 1527 while for Tirol the end of the second phase occurred sometime in the 1540s (Clasen used 1549). In 1540 the Hutterite leader Peter Riedemann in his *Account of our Religion, Doctrine and Faith*, prescribed a secondary position for Anabaptist women living in Moravia similar to that prescribed by Menno Simons. Reference has already been made to the confession of Helena von Freyberg in Augsburg in the 1540s as another indicator of the end of the second phase of Anabaptism in southern regions.⁵⁴ But more research is needed on the turning points and circumstances which brought them about in Tirol.

Like other historians of Anabaptism, Clasen referred to Anabaptist leaders as male. In the discussion of his lists of Anabaptist leaders he made no reference

to women leaders despite the fact that the list for Tirol included four women, three for the first phase, 1525 to 1529 and one for the second phase after 1530. In the total list for all of the southern regions only six women's names were included. A Swiss woman, "Friedle from Oberweiler" appears on his list very late, between 1580 and 1589.⁵⁵ But, the names of Agnes Linck von Biel and Margaret Hottinger who we now know were lay leaders in Swiss regions are not included. Katharina Valebs was the only woman named for the early period in Hessen, 1525 to 1529, whereas more recent work has brought to light quite a number of women leaders in Hessen.⁵⁶ A careful reading of the second volume of court records [Täuferakten] for Austria, edited by Grete Mecenseffy and published in 1972, the same year as Clasen's book,⁵⁷ shows that in the early phase of Anabaptism in Tirol, between 1525 and 1529, when women are included, the number of leaders is between 60 and 65, a 35 percent increase over Clasen's figures. Whereas Clasen found only three women among Tirol's 45 new leaders for this early period—two of whom he labelled "maybe leaders"—the court records indicate that all three of these women and twelve more, were active lay leaders, vocal supporters of Anabaptism, engaged in holding meetings and teaching others.⁵⁸ In all, 210 women joined the Anabaptist movement in Tirol between 1527 and 1529 and of these, 15 can be considered lay leaders.⁵⁹ Although this may not seem like a large number, in relative terms—one out of every 14 women was a leader—it is a high proportion.

What do the court records of Tirol reveal about male and female Anabaptist leaders? First of all, the names of the leaders are grouped together by the locations in which they were active, indicating that there were leadership networks. The women who were part of these leadership networks were not, "lone individuals" as Sigrun Haude claims, but worked together with male leaders.⁶⁰ The specific examples which follow will bring this to light.

In March, 1528 the local authorities around Kitzbühel were instructed to arrest three male leaders. They were certain these men were agitators and were leading others astray. They described them as: "die rechte Aufrüher und Verführer der Sekte der Wiedertäufer."⁶¹ In the following year, May 26, 1529, a government report named four key leaders [Hauptwiedertäufer], all men, who were active south of Kitzbühel in the Ziller Valley.⁶² In addition to the four male leaders, the authorities had heard about an Anabaptist woman who supposedly had in her possession a register containing the names of 800 Anabaptists. It had been reported that there were this many Anabaptists in the mining town of Schwaz east of Innsbruck. If this report was true, it meant there was a high concentration of Anabaptists in this region, given that the town of Schwaz only had a population of 1200. We do not know if this register contained only the names of the Anabaptists in Schwaz or if it also included other regions in Tirol. Clasen gives a figure of 455 for the total number of Anabaptist converts in all of Tirol between 1525 and 1529. The discrepancies between these figures indicate there were many Anabaptists whom we know nothing about since they were not arrested and hence not recorded in the government documents.⁶³ Unfortunately

the register this woman was carrying did not survive and nothing more is known about it. Ten days later, on June 5, 1529, the directive to search for this woman was repeated to the local authorities in Schwaz. In her summary of this directive, Grete Mecenseffy, using the exact words of the original, handwritten document, as recorded by the court scribe, refers to this woman as a “Vorsteherin”—a leader—who supposedly baptized others.⁶⁴ We can be certain that she was a leader, but the assumption that she was a baptizer is less likely. In any case, whoever she was, this woman managed to elude the authorities and carry out her responsibility of keeping the register of Anabaptist members. No other information is available about her.

Anna Egger, the one-eyed sister of Peter Egger the baker, was another woman who worked with male leaders. April 4, 1528 it was reported Anna, her brother Peter and a man named Lorenz Aufleger had been preaching and baptizing in the district of St. Petersburg, a region west of Innsbruck and their native Hall. That Anna baptized others is a possibility, but not definitely stated. Although Clasen names her brother as a leader, he qualifies her name and that of Aufleger as “maybe leaders.”⁶⁵ No other information is available about Anna Egger. Her sister-in-law Cristina, Peter’s wife, had been exiled but chose to recant so that she could return to Hall to care for their many children.⁶⁶ Perhaps her single status gave Anna greater freedom to travel and take on a leadership role.

Another leadership network was based at Münichau, southeast of Innsbruck. Here the noblewoman Helena von Freyberg was leader of a house church at her castle where she allowed the former priest Paulus Rassler and his student to preach. She also supported the former priest Jacob Partzner, whose letter she brought to a group of Anabaptists in prison in July of 1528.⁶⁷ Thoman Hermann was a fellow baptizer of Partzner and therefore part of this network as well. The baptizer Hans Schwaigkhofer was executed at the same time as Peter Äschlberger who gave the authorities the information they needed to arrest Helena.⁶⁸ Thus, the network of male and female leaders around Münichau was quite large.

On December 16, 1528 it was reported that a man had struck a deal with the authorities, that if his brother would be pardoned he would strive to bring certain key Anabaptist leaders and people who had led others astray [Prinzipaltäuffer und Verführer] to prison, namely: “Michl Kürschner, Mathis Waldner and his wife, also a woman named Gallpüchlerin.”⁶⁹ We know that Michl Kürschner (who baptized over 100 persons at various places in the Eisack and Adige Valleys), had himself been baptized and affirmed as a leader by Jörg Zaunriedt, in the presence of two women and a man, all from Völs.⁷⁰ But less information is available about the other three persons named in this report. Were Mathis Waldner and his wife missionary co-leaders, a clergy couple? We cannot say for certain but it is a possibility. The fact that she is named along with her husband seems to imply that. Claus-Peter Clasen may not have expected a married woman to be a leader and so put “maybe leader” beside her name in his list.⁷¹ On the other hand, the Gallpüchlerin is the only woman whom Clasen does not

qualify in this way. Probably she was a widow. Her name comes up again a few days later, and again it is linked to Michl Kürschner, but this time also to a woman named Silberin. Both women had been with Kürschner on the mountain of Braitenberg with fourteen other people. The meeting they attended had included a celebration of the Lord's Supper.⁷² The fact that Ferdinand attached to this report instructions for authorities in all the cities and districts of Tirol to arrest these people and send them to Bozen, indicates that these leaders, both women and men, were travelling about and could be expected to appear next anywhere in the territory.⁷³

Aside from this single reference, no other information is available about the Silberin. Perhaps she was also a widow since no male guardian is named in relation to her. However, we have more information about the Gallpüchlerin whose case had been discussed already in June, 1526 when she was accused of "sacrilegious talk" [freventlich Reden]. The nature of her rebellious behaviour is not known to us. This took place soon after the end of the Peasants' War and the instructions to the local authorities at that time had been to arrest her and search her house for letters.⁷⁴ Her sons-in-law reportedly had held Anabaptist meetings in January, 1528 and her unmarried daughter travelled about with George Blaurock who had come from Switzerland with his wife Els to proselytize in Tirol.⁷⁵ Her married daughter, Margret Kobl, imprisoned for the first time in May, 1528 when she was pregnant and again several months later, was able to escape both times.⁷⁶ The Gallpüchlerin also managed to evade prolonged imprisonment, enabling her to remain active in the network of leaders in the districts of Völs and Bozen.⁷⁷

A second manner in which women leaders are presented in the court records of Tirol is in terms of their proselytization endeavours. Ursula Binder, for instance, was arrested near Salzburg while on a missionary journey with her husband. They are another example of a clergy couple.⁷⁸ Their message had been apocalyptic in nature and urgent, demanding the participation of everyone, not just men. But it was not only the urgency of the 'end times' which influenced female Anabaptists.⁷⁹ Other women who proselytized on their own or with other women were Anna Krätlerin,⁸⁰ Barbara Velcklehner and her sister-in-law,⁸¹ the two sisters of Caspar Schwartz⁸² and Dorothea Maler.⁸³ That they were quite effective goes without saying. For instance, in May, 1529 a young boy reported that Gilg Klein's wife "had made six new Christians in a short time."⁸⁴

It is Clasen's view that "From the start uneducated people also played a leading role among the Anabaptists."⁸⁵ This was certainly the case in Tirol where the majority of the Anabaptists were peasant farmers. Among the minority of male artisans and craftsmen involved in the movement, some may have had a rudimentary formal education. Very few women of that time would have been able to read.⁸⁶ Some Anabaptist leaders, when questioned by the authorities, tried to downplay their leadership role by saying they had merely been reading the Gospel to others. In 1529, a mining official named Ulrich Stadler who later became a prominent Hutterite leader, told officials at Sterzing,

"He had never done any 'corner preaching' [Winkelpredigten] or held meetings [Versammlungen]. He only had read the Holy Gospel, now and then, whenever anyone asked him to."⁸⁷ Since so few people in the sixteenth century could read, it is logical that any literate person could more easily become a leader. The authorities included reading to others on their list of criminal offenses since reading the Gospel spread knowledge of its contents and hence the movement gained members.

Literacy was more common for upper class women like Helena von Freyberg than for the wives of artisans and peasant farmers. Two women from these latter classes come to light as leaders because of their literacy. Both women were named in the January, 1527 testimony of the popular radical leader named Wolfl. This 'corner preacher' told his interrogators that the Landbergerin who lived in Hall near Innsbruck had given him her full support already in 1526. She had read many Lutheran writings to him and told him he should simply preach and not let others silence him. If he was driven from one place, he should move on to the next and continue preaching. We know nothing about the background of this woman except that two years later, in January, 1528 the authorities were directed to arrest her on suspicion of being an Anabaptist. Wolfl, the man whom she had instructed, died as an Anabaptist martyr sometime later, in 1534.⁸⁸ The wife of the knifsmith Mathias Messerschmied was also linked to Wolfl. She could write as well as read and thus assisted in producing the letter of complaint which the Anabaptists of Klausen posted on the church door in support of Wolfl.⁸⁹ Her husband had been one of the preachers supporting Michael Gaismaier, the chief leader in the Peasants' War. During 1526 Wolfl led meetings in the home of the Messerschmieds who had given him lodging and protection. At these meetings Messerschmied's wife assisted "by reading the Scriptures or pamphlet literature."⁹⁰ One could therefore classify the Messerschmieds as another example of a clergy couple.

The court records for mid 1529 include reports about a male leader named Jacob Hutter, now familiar to us as a founder of the Hutterites. He had been influenced already in 1526 by the radical wandering preacher, Wolfl.⁹¹ The contact which Elisabeth von Wolkenstein's family had with Anabaptism also went back to 1526 and bore fruit in the 1530s when Hutter frequented the Wolkenstein residence. During these years Elisabeth sheltered refugee Anabaptists, allowed meetings to take place in their home and discussed religious matters with many Anabaptists besides Jacob Hutter.⁹² In the research of Claus-Peter Clasen neither Hutter, his wife Katharina, nor Elisabeth von Wolkenstein appear on the list of leaders for the early time period. According to Clasen there was only one female Anabaptist leader in Tirol between 1530 and 1539, an anonymous woman, the wife of a smith from Au near Feldkirch.⁹³ Further research will no doubt reveal more women leaders in Tirol after 1529.

One thing that is not clear from the court records of Tirol is whether women were baptizers of new believers.⁹⁴ Clasen lists eleven male leaders in Tirol between 1527 and 1529 where the accusations against them specifically in-

cluded baptizing others. The cases of Anna Egger and the unnamed woman who carried a register have already been mentioned. For Helena von Freyberg there is no evidence that she baptized others or that she preached, as did three women in June, 1528 in the Austrian territory of Steyr.⁹⁵ But there is no doubt that Helena was a house church leader and active Anabaptist teacher.⁹⁶ Her name does not appear on any of Clasen's lists.

Conclusion

In this examination of different informal leadership activities within the Anabaptist movement, whether in organizing, hosting or leading meetings, proselytizing, doing deacon work or discussing Anabaptist theology, Anabaptist women formed an integral part of larger leadership networks and shared authority with men as lay leaders in the early years of the movement in the Austrian territory of Tirol as well as in other regions of Europe. The Reformation was a revolutionary time period. But the Radical Reformation proved even more so with its rejection of traditional church hierarchy and extension of more rights to lay persons in general, its openness to charismatic, self-appointed leadership, its focus on the New Testament and the spiritual equality of all Christian believers, all during a time of severe persecution and the general apocalyptic mood of the period, and in some areas, a brutal Peasants' War. For all of these reasons, women had greater opportunities to share authority with men than they would have in the later years of the Anabaptist movement. Claus-Peter Clasen's research of the 1970s demonstrates that there were different phases of participation for all Anabaptist leaders, women as well as men. However, more recent publications have shown there were substantially more female leaders than the few Clasen named. From the biographies of women leaders in *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers* and further analysis of the court records on women leaders in Tirol, we clearly can conclude that in the early phase of Anabaptism, at a time when gender and class divisions were minimized, women acted as lay leaders. Their numbers were not as large as their male counterparts, which is not surprising given the expectations and restrictions of sixteenth century society for women. Nevertheless, women had a significant role in the early phase of the Anabaptist movement, not just as rebaptized members but as important leaders. They had a "window of opportunity," a brief moment in time and chose to use it.

Notes

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Schlachta for her help in deciphering some of the handwritten documents related to Anabaptist women in Tirol. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference "EnGendering the Past: Women and Men in Mennonite History," Winnipeg, Manitoba, Oct. 17, 1998.

¹ The complete passage reads: "For a while these two traditions—the revolutionary and the patriarchal—clashed, but soon the revolutionary tradition was stamped out, sealing an interpretation of women as inferior that has continued to this day. For a brief moment in history, a window of opportunity to reverse patriarchy opened, and then it was slammed shut." Sue Monk Kidd, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter A Woman's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), 69. In regard to the patriarchal tradition of the sixteenth century see Heide Wunder, *"Er ist die Sonn, sie ist der Mond" Frauen in der Frühen Neuzeit* (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1992) which is also available in English.

² Harold S. Bender, "Women, Status of" in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1959), IV, 972. Hereafter this source will be referred to as ME. Max Weber may have been encouraged by his wife Marianne, who had a concern for women's issues. He hypothesized that, "The religion of the disprivileged classes...is characterized by a tendency to allot equality to women....The great receptivity of women to all religious prophecy except that which is exclusively military or political in orientation comes to a very clear expression in the completely unconstrained relationships with women maintained by practically all prophets, the Buddha as well as Christ and Pythagoras. But only in very rare cases does this practice continue beyond the first stage of a religious community's formation, when the pneumatic manifestations of charisma are valued as hallmarks of specifically religious exaltation. Thereafter, as routinization and regimentation of community relationships set in, a reaction takes place against pneumatic manifestations among women, which come to be regarded as dishonourable and morbid. In Christianity this appears already with Paul." Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. by Ephraim Fischhoff (Boston: Beacon press, 1922), 104, 105. In his groundbreaking volume on the Radical Reformation, George Williams also used Weber to interpret the experiences of Anabaptist women. George Hunston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 506-07. Williams repeats this position in the revised and expanded edition of his book: *The Radical Reformation*, Third Edition, Volume XV, Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, Inc., 1992), 762.

³ "...Christianity became a liberating force in the lives of women.... We must distinguish, however, two different traditions within Christianity. One was the tradition of the organized church.... The other was the contemplative and prophetic tradition, which kept alive the principle of equality proclaimed in the Gospels. Prejudices against women were already articulated in some of the Pauline Epistles. But, as long as Christianity remained a revolutionary sect, with its adherents forming a state within a state, the dominant message of the Gospels was not forgotten." Suzanne Fonay Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500-900* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 6, 191; "Women's leadership also appears where lay leadership is stressed. Various renewal movements in left-wing Protestantism, as well as Catholicism, have been marked by an anticlericalism that validated the authority of the entire community to teach, interpret the Bible and evangelize. Those who have the gifts, rather than those authorized by the traditional institution, are acclaimed as leaders. In this situation women too can emerge as leaders. However, in the next generation, as renewal movements settle down and begin themselves to institutionalize, there is a loss of this early freedom. Institutionalized leadership again reverts to the patriarchal pattern, and women are eliminated. One can find this phenomenon recurring again and again in the history of Christianity." Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin, eds., *Women*

of Spirit, *Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 20; Regarding monasticism and medieval heretical movements see: Penny Shine Gold, "Male/Female Cooperation: The Example of Fontevrault," in *Distant Echoes, Medieval Religious Women Volume One*, ed., John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1984), 151–168; Robert E. Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), note # 7, 230; Ernest W. McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), n. 81, 126, 197; R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1970), 143; Gottfried Koch, *Frauenfrage und Ketzertum im Mittelalter: die Frauenbewegung im Rahmen des Katharismus und des Waldensertums und ihre sozialen Wurzeln* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1962), 159; Shulamith Shaher, *The Fourth Estate A History of Women in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Chaya Galai (New York: Methuen, 1983), 258; Richard Kieckhefer, *Repression of Heresy in Medieval Germany* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 111; "During the movement's first decades, Quakers urged and enacted their experience of salvation in a highly public arena—in streets, marketplaces, churches, fields, and prisons—and they did this through flamboyant public gestures: symbolic signs, charismatic preaching, and martyrdom. By the final years of the century, after decades of systematic persecution.... Their public behaviour, now subjected to the moral discipline of recognized elders and ministers, became sober and restrained." Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 1–2; See also: Martin H. Jung, *Frauen des Pietismus, Zehn Porträts* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998), 9; Elizabeth Gillan Muir, *Petticoats in the Pulpit The Story of Nineteenth-Century Methodist Women Preachers in Upper Canada* (Toronto, Ont.: The United Church Publishing House, 1991), 30; Elizabeth Gillan Muir and Marilyn Färdig Whiteley, eds. *Changing Roles of Women within the Christian Church in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 5–8; Marilyn Färdig Whiteley, "Deaconess Redefined: Seeking a Role for Women in the Holiness Churches of Ralph Horner," Paper presented to the Society for Scientific Study of Religion, Montreal, Quebec, November 6, 1998.

⁴ Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women*, 1–2. Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women Sexual Politics & Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). Juster discusses Baptist women in pre and post revolutionary New England based on their conversion narratives, quite a different source than the heresy trial records (Täuferakten) available on Anabaptist women.

⁵ Max Weber's hypothesis was used in Linda Huebert Hecht, "Faith and Action: The Role of Women in the Anabaptist Movement of the Tirol, 1527–1529" (unpublished Cognate Essay, Master of Arts, History, University of Waterloo, 1990), 11 and 22. This study found 268 women linked to Anabaptism, of whom 210 were members of the movement. References to Weber's hypothesis are found in Marion Kobelt-Groch, *Aufsässige Töchter Gottes Frauen im Bauernkrieg und in den Täuferbewegungen* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 1993), 154. In her research on Anabaptist women prophets in Strasbourg, Lois Y. Barrett describes one of the early phases of women's participation. See: "Wreath of glory: Ursula Jost's prophetic visions in the context of Reformation and revolt in southwestern Germany, 1525–1530," PhD dissertation, The Union Institute, 1992. This hypothesis is discussed in C. Arnold Snyder and Linda A. Huebert Hecht, eds., *Profiles of Anabaptist Women, Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996), 9–10, 51. Hereafter this book will be referred to as, Profiles.

⁶ In the 1970's Roland Bainton took a different approach than Bender and Williams. In his view women achieved religious equality with men in the Reformation. He included one chapter on Anabaptist women in his book, *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy* (Augsburg Publishing House, 1973). Bainton's writings evoked a reaction from Irwin who claimed that the religious status of women did not change until the Quaker movement of the seventeenth century. Joyce L. Irwin, *Womanhood in Radical Protestantism 1525–1675* (New York: E. Mellen, 1979), xvii.

⁷ Claus-Peter Clasen, "Executions of Anabaptists, 1525–1618, A Research Report," MQR, XLVII No.2 (April, 1973), 82.

⁸ Claus-Peter Clasen, *Anabaptism A Social History, 1525-1618 Switzerland, Austria, Moravia, South and Central Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 207. See also the lists of Anabaptist members in: Claus-Peter Clasen, *The Anabaptists in South and Central Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, their names, occupations, places of residence and dates of conversion: 1525–1618* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Quarterly Review, 1978). (Hereafter this journal will be referred to as MQR.)

⁹ Sigrun Haude, "Anabaptist Women–Radical Women?" in *Infinite Boundaries Order, Disorder, and Reorder in Early Modern German Culture*, ed., Max Reinhart (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, Inc., 1998) 317. Haude also states: "Females experienced the greatest equality with men when congregations emphasized the Spirit over Scripture." But she attributes this to the different emphases among Anabaptist groups, not to the different phases. *Ibid.*, 318–19. Haude's claims that the two-phase model is based on the prescriptions of men is not correct. See Huebert Hecht, "Faith and Action" which uses only court records and not male Anabaptist prescriptions, to illustrate the involvement of women in the early Anabaptist movement of Tirol.

¹⁰ Haude claims that the multiple origins of Anabaptism make the idea of different phases "an exceedingly vague concept." "Anabaptist Women–Radical Women?" 317. Regarding the multiple origins of Anabaptism see Klaus Deppermann, Werner O. Packull, and James M. Stayer, "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins," MQR, 49 (1975). See also Profiles, 2.

¹¹ Haude, "Anabaptist Women–Radical Women?" p.318.

¹² Helene's confession is published and discussed in: Linda Huebert Hecht, "An Extraordinary Lay Leader: The Life and Work of Helene of Freyberg, Sixteenth Century Noblewoman and Anabaptist from the Tirol," MQR, LXVI (July 1992), No.3, 327–41. See also Linda Huebert Hecht, "Helena von Freyberg of Münichau," in Profiles, 131–35.

¹³ James M. Stayer, "The Passing of the Radical Moment in the Radical Reformation," MQR LXXI (January 1997), 1, 149.

¹⁴ Profiles, 12

¹⁵ James M. Stayer, "Anabaptists and Future Anabaptists in the Peasants' War," MQR, LXII No.2 (April 1988), 131. See also Werner O. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings Communitarian Experiments during the Reformation* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 188. Anabaptists in Tirol were among the most severely persecuted, in part due to their ruler, Ferdinand I, who was an "honest fanatic." *Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁶ Grete Mecenseffy, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer, XIII Band, Österreich, II Teil* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1972), 22:24–31; 23:3–11; 267:5–7; 270:25–27. Hereafter this source will be referred to as Ost.II followed by the page number, a colon and the line number of the quotation. See Ferdinand's mandate of August 20, 1527 in Grete Mecenseffy, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer, XI Band, Österreich, I Teil* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1964), 3–12.

¹⁷ "Mandates were the laws of the Holy Roman Empire which gave instructions to the higher officials." See the article "Mandates," in ME, III, 446, 447, 451.

¹⁸ Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, *A History of Their Own, Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present, Vol. I* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), 243.

¹⁹ Shahar states of the Waldensians: "Such a group needs the support of all its members, and this precipitates the collapse not only of class divisions but also of divisions between the sexes." See her book *The Fourth Estate*, 258. A more contemporary example from Germany is in a newspaper notice that reads as follows. "The ordination of women to the ministry as a means of relieving an acute clergy shortage has been approved by the synods of three territorial Evangelical Churches in Germany, two in the West and one in the Soviet zone." in the newspaper, *The Canadian Mennonite*,

Oct. 31, 1958, 3.

²⁰ Ost.II, 108:33–36.

²¹ In Tirol female members constituted 46% of the Anabaptist membership. Huebert Hecht, "Faith and Action," 33. Roland Bainton stated: "Women constituted a half of the population, and had they boycotted the movement [the Reformation], one may be sure that would have been the end." *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy*, 9.

²² Writing in the 1960s Wolfgang Schäufele stated: "...there was no distinction between an academically educated ministerial class on the one hand and the laity on the other. Each member was potentially a preacher and a missionary, and each single member had equal opportunities for advancement according to his own competence, just as was the case in primitive Christianity. Luther's 'priesthood of all believers' became a practical reality in Anabaptism...." See his article, "The Missionary Vision and Activity of the Anabaptist Laity," in *MQR*, 35 (April 1962), 100. An article in *The Canadian Mennonite*, February 25, 1964, 1 reported that Cornelius J. Dyck, speaking at the Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg had said: "All Christians are priests and Christian baptism is their ordination...."

²³ Natalie Davis describes the Anabaptist movement as less professional, bookish, and hierarchical. See her article, "City Women and Religious Change" in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France, Eight Essays* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1975), 84.

²⁴ Profiles, 8, 10, 11. In Lois Y. Barrett, "Ursula Jost and Barbara Rebstock of Strasbourg," in Profiles, 282, the author explains that it was the "visionary and prophetic experiences" of these women that gave them spiritual authority, not any kind of office.

²⁵ S. N. Eisenstadt, ed., *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building, Selected Papers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 20.

²⁶ The quotation is from: Ruether and McLaughlin, eds. *Women of Spirit, Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, 19. Merry E. Wiesner discusses how divine inspiration gave women the freedom to speak out on religious matters and to act in the public sphere. At a time when restrictions on the activities of women were increasing, some women ignored the limitations between public and private spheres as they had been defined by men. This explanation applies to Anabaptist women as well. See her article, "Women's Defense of Their Public Role," *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed., Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 3. Methodist women preachers were: "Convinced that they had been called by the Holy Spirit,..." Muir, *Petticoats in the Pulpit*, 1. Lois Y. Barrett "Women's History/Women's Theology: Theological and Methodological Issues in the Writing of the History Anabaptist-Mennonite Women," *Conrad Grebel Review* 10 (Winter 1992), 12–13.

²⁷ Here I am relying on Phyllis Mack who states: "...yet it was precisely because women had no formal authority as ordained ministers or magistrates that their activities were so effective in shaping and sustaining the Quakers' charismatic movement in its formative years." *Visionary Women*, 4.

²⁸ Merry E. Wiesner, "Frail, Weak, and Helpless: Women's Legal Postition in Theory and Reality," in *Regnum, Religio et Ratio: Essays presented to Robert M. Kingdon*, ed., Jerome Friedman (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Publishers, 1987).

²⁹ Ost.II, 39:26; 98:6.

³⁰ Claus-Peter Clasen, "The Sociology of Swabian Anabaptism," *Church History*, XXXII (1963), 150.

³¹ From Hannelore Sachs, *The Renaissance Woman*, trans. By Marianne Hertzfeld (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971), 48, cited in Anderson and Zinsser, *A History of Their Own*, 246.

³² From Bainton, *Germany and Italy*, 247, cited in Anderson and Zinsser, *A History of Their Own*, 246.

³³ C. Arnold Snyder, "The Swiss Anabaptist Context," in Profiles, 19.

³⁴ C. Arnold Snyder, "Agnes Linck From Biel," in Profiles, 32–37

³⁵ C. Arnold Snyder, "Margret Hottinger of Zollikon," in Profiles, 47.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, in Profiles, 49.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, in Profiles, 51. As yet we have no analysis of the number of women involved in Anabaptism before and after the Schleithem Articles were passed.

³⁸ C. Arnold Snyder, "The North German/Dutch Anabaptist Context," in Profiles, 248.

³⁹ Lois Y. Barrett, "Ursula Jost and Barbara Rebstock of Strasbourg," in Profiles, 273, 274, 279.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, in Profiles, 279–282. The debate with David Joris took place in 1538.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, in Profiles 275; Cheryl Nafziger-Leis, "Margarethe Prüss of Strasbourg," in Profiles, 258–272.

⁴² John Oyer, "Anabaptist Women Leaders in Augsburg," in Profiles, 91.

⁴³ Stayer, "The Passing of the Radical Moment in the Radical Reformation," 149. Stayer refers here also to the recantations or "backsliding" of Wilhelm Reublin in the later years of his life.

⁴⁴ Bonny Rademaker-Helfferich, "Fenneke van Geelen of Deventer," in Profiles, 305–315; Werner O. Packull, "Anna Jansz of Rotterdam," in Profiles, 336–351.

⁴⁵ Marion Kobelt-Groch, "Hille Feicken of Sneek," in Profiles, 288–297; Marion Kobelt-Groch, "Divara of Haarlem," in Profiles, 298–304, especially 300; C. Arnold Snyder, "The North German/Dutch Anabaptist Context," in Profiles, 247, 250, 251.

⁴⁶ Abraham Friesen, "Mennonites" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, Vol. 3, 53; Profiles 252–53.

⁴⁷ Leonard Verduin, trans., *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 383. Cited in Profiles, 257 n.37.

⁴⁸ M. Lucille Marr, "Anabaptist Women of the North: Peers in the Faith, Subordinates in Marriage," MQR, LXI (October 1987), n.39, 355.

⁴⁹ Cornelius J. Dyck, "Elisabeth and Hadewijk of Friesland," in Profiles, 359–364; C. Arnold Snyder, "The North German/Dutch Anabaptist Context," in Profiles, 253. Elisabeth also became a martyr.

⁵⁰ Beth Kreitzer, "Menno Simons and the Bride of Christ," MQR, LXX, 1 (July 1996), 317.

⁵¹ C. Arnold Snyder, "The North German/Dutch Anabaptist Context," in Profiles, 247, 254, 255. *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, eds. Christian Hege und Christian Neff, Erster Band, 1913, 692–93.

⁵² Linda Huebert Hecht, "Anna Gasser," in Profiles, 140, 145.

⁵³ Claus-Peter Clasen, "The Anabaptist Leaders: Their Numbers and Background, Switzerland, Austria, South and Central Germany 1525–1618," MQR, XLIX No.2 (April, 1975), 123, 124.

⁵⁴ See C. Arnold Snyder, "The South German/Austrian Anabaptist Context," in Profiles, 77 and Marlene Epp and H. Julia Roberts, "Women in the Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren," in Profiles, 204 in regard to Peter Riedemann. See Linda Huebert Hecht, Helena von Freyberg of Münichau," in Profiles, 130 regarding the death of Helena.

⁵⁵ Regarding the four women named for Tirol see Clasen, "Anabaptist Leaders," 144–46. Regarding Friedle and Katharina Valebs see *Ibid.*, 136, 159.

⁵⁶ Astrid von Schlachta, "Silent Pioneers or Preachers of the Anabaptist Faith? Anabaptist Women in Hessen and Thuringia in the Sixteenth Century," Paper presented at the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference, Toronto, Ontario, October 25, 1998. von Schlachta has expanded on the work of Marion Kobelt-Groch, "Why did Petronella leave her husband? Reflections on marital avoidance among the Halberstadt Anabaptists," MQR, LXII (January 1988), 26–41.

⁵⁷ Between 1972 and 1975 Clasen found more leaders in the records and increased the number of leaders for Tirol from 33 to 45. Compare *Anabaptism A Social History*, 21 and "Anabaptist Leaders," 123. When his book was published in 1972 Clasen did not yet have access to the court records of Tirol edited by Grete Mecenseffy and published the same year as his book. Thus, research using Mecenseffy's Ost.II could include others that Clasen missed. Several male leaders not on his list are: Cristan Taurer, Ulrich Kobl and Adam (Manngl). See reference to Mecenseffy above.

⁵⁸ Clasen found that "die Gallpüchlerin" was a bonafide female leader but for Anna Egger and the wife of Mathis Waldner he was not sure. See "Anabaptist Leaders," 144, 145.

⁵⁹ Huebert Hecht, "Faith and Action," 33.

⁶⁰ Haude, "Anabaptist women—Radical Women?" 317.

⁶¹ Ost.II, 98, document 105.

⁶² The four men were: Hans Streicher, Adam Stainer, Paul von Zillerprugg and Wolf Mayr. Ost.II, 239 document 342.

⁶³ Clasen, *Anabaptism A Social History*, 21.

⁶⁴ The exact German words transcribed from the handwritten document are: "ain vorsteerin, die auch widertauff und ain Registerbuch, handig hat, darhin...800 widertaufft personen vermerk und..." The title of this document reads: "Wiedertaufferin Vorsteherin zu Schawz." Kopialbuch "Causa Domoni" 1527–1529, Bl.422v in the Tiroler Landesarchiv, summarized in Ost.II, 249:20–21. The discussion in this document is definitely about a woman leader in Schwaz. The phrase "die auch widertauff" may or may not mean she was a baptizer. It could merely mean she was an Anabaptist. It is not likely that she baptized 800 people.

⁶⁵ Ost.II, 119, document 120. Clasen, "Anabaptist Leaders," 143, 144. Linda Huebert Hecht, "Wives, Female Leaders, and Two Female Martyrs From Hall," in Profiles, 187–88.

⁶⁶ Ost.II, 192, document 258.

⁶⁷ Linda Huebert Hecht, "Helena von Freyberg of Münichau," in Profiles, 126. Helena had been baptized by either Paul Ressler or Hanns Rat and had given the brothers and sisters financial support with eleven Gulden, the equivalent of a month's salary of a civil servant. See Ost.II, 311:1–4. In regard to the value of the Gulden see Jan J. Kiwiet, *Pilgram Marpeck, Ein Führer in der Täufer Bewegung der Reformationszeit* (Kassel: J. G. Oncken Verlag, 1957), 38.

⁶⁸ Linda Huebert Hecht, "Helena von Freyberg of Münichau," in Profiles, 127; Ost.II, 161:5–6; 312:20–22.

⁶⁹ Ost.II, 183:25–30. The quotation is translated from lines 28–29. The original handwritten document is found in the Kopialbuch "Causa Domoni" 1527–1529, Bl.331v in the Tiroler Landesarchiv. It does not shed light on what the role of Mathis Waldner's wife was.

⁷⁰ For a brief biography of Michl Kürschner see ME, III, 261. The three people present when he was affirmed as a leader were: Melchior Schneider's wife, Matheusen Walds and his wife Magdalena. See Ost.II, 248, document 349.

⁷¹ Clasen, "Anabaptist Leaders," 145. Elizabeth Muir refers to Methodist husband and wife teams as clergy couples in *Petticoats in the Pulpit*, 23. Sigrun Haude speaks of co-teachers in, "Anabaptist Women—Radical Women?" n.13, 318.

⁷² We can say the Silberin was an Anabaptist lay leader on the assumption that the authorities always singled out the names of the leaders and also because she is named here with two others whose leadership activities are known to us. The Silberin's name is not on Clasen's list of leaders for Tirol. The reference to the Lord's Supper is cited in: Kobelt-Groch, *Aufsässige Töchter Gottes*, n.14, p.191.

⁷³ Ost.II, 185:23–30.

⁷⁴ This information is in a document entitled: "Empörung der Bauern in Tirol," Kopialbuch, Hs.

1874, Bl.477r-477v; Bl.567v-568r and Bl.579v, Tiroler Landesarchiv cited in Kobelt-Groch, *Aufsässige Töchter Gottes*, n.14, p.191. Regarding the role of women in the Peasants' War see, Marion Kobelt-Groch, "Von 'armen frowen' und 'boesen wibern'—Frauen im Bauernkrieg zwischen Anpassung und Auflehnung," *Archive for Reformation History*, 79 (1988).

⁷⁵ See Ost.II, 81:10f. and Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, n.107, 369.

⁷⁶ Regarding Margret Kobl see, Ost.II, 134:35; 136:4f; 164:25; 165:8; 176:26; 221:44. A reference in Ost.II, 70:2 early in February 1528 indicates the Gallpüchlerin had been released on oath. The name Kobl is also mentioned in this regard but it is not clear if this refers to Margret.

⁷⁷ The lack of further references to her after December, 1528 indicates she continued her work throughout 1529.

⁷⁸ Ursula Binder is included in this sample because her case was discussed in the Tirol court records. See Ost.II, 25:21-22; 26:4-11, 31.

⁷⁹ See also the references to Ursula Jost and Barbara Rebstock above.

⁸⁰ Ost.II, 137:24; 144:20f.

⁸¹ Ost.II, 133, 145, 196, 197, 201, 216.

⁸² Ost.II, 238:5.

⁸³ Dorothea Maler's story is in Profiles, 75, 188-92, 208.

⁸⁴ Ost.II, 229:24.

⁸⁵ Clasen, "Anabaptist Leaders," 125.

⁸⁶ See Profiles, 3, 6-7.

⁸⁷ This man is on Clasen's list as a "maybe leader." See Clasen, "Anabaptist Leaders," 145. My translation here is from Mecenseffy's summary of his statement in Ost.II, 258:27-29. His case is discussed in Ost.II, 258-59 and 261-62. See also, ME, IV, 607-08.

⁸⁸ Regarding the Landbergerin see, Matthias Schmelzer, "Jakob Hutters Wirken im Lichte von Bekenntnissen gefangener Täufer," in *Der Schlern Monatszeitschrift Für Südtiroler Landeskunde*, 63 (November 1989), Heft 11, 617, 618 and Ost.II, 49:1-2. Regarding Wolfl see Schmelzer, "Jakob Huter," 615-618 and Grete Mecenseffy, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer, XIV Band, Österreich III. Teil* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1983), 262, 263, 314. A third woman named by Wolfl is the Phlegerin of Guifidaun, wife of the official in charge of Guifidaun, who gave the radical preacher some reading material, excerpts either from evangelical literature or from the Gospels themselves, and affirmed that his teachings were correct. We do not know if she later became an Anabaptist. Schmelzer, "Jakob Huter," 617.

⁸⁹ Schmelzer, "Jakob Huter," 616:32.

⁹⁰ Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, 176. Messerschmied, who was imprisoned already in September, 1524, was "A leading figure of these sacramentists...." He went to Augsburg after his release from prison in January, 1525 where the former cannon of Innichen in the Puster Valley learned to be a knifsmith. "He returned to the Tyrol late in 1525 or early in 1526 with literature and a literate wife." *Ibid.*, 176.

⁹¹ Wolfl had an important influence on Hutter. He convinced him to buy a New Testament. Hutter then conducted New Testament readings in the home of his employer. See Grete Mecenseffy, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer, XIV Band, Österreich III Teil* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1983), 314 and Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, 178, 199.

⁹² Wolfl spent eight days at the Wolkenstein residence. See Schmelzer, "Jakob Huter," 616. See also Matthias Schmelzer, "Elisabeth von Wolkenstein of Uttenheim," in Profiles, 166, 167. Hutter visited the Wolkenstein residence on his return missionary journeys to Tirol.

⁹³ Clasen, "Anabaptist Leaders," 146. Elfriede Lichdi, "Katharina Purst Hutter of Sterzing," in Profiles, 178-86.

⁹⁴ Wolfgang Schäufele comments that at the very beginning of the movement ordinary members could baptize but does not include women in this regard. See his book, *Das missionarische Bewusstsein und Wirken der Täufer, Dargestellt nach oberdeutschen Quellen* (Lemgo: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1966), 298.

⁹⁵ The three women who preached were: the Fleischackherin, the Gallin, and the Kreutzerin. See Grete Mecenseffy, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer, XI Band, Österreich, I Teil* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1964), 154; 6 and 9–11; 155:27.

⁹⁶ Linda Huebert Hecht, "Hägläna von Freyberg of Münichau," in *Profiles*, 124–139.