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Men of War, Men of Peace: Brethren Ideologies and the Civil War

By

Annemarie R. Hartzell

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in the Discipline in  
English and the Elizabethtown College Honors Program

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**Introduction:**

Nonviolent religious groups have often stood apart from general society by choice. Specifically, Brethren beliefs and actions tended to resist mainstream culture, and the degree that the religion clings to its principles speaks to the commitment of its members. No period makes these commitments more prominent than in times of war, where patriotism and propaganda often serve to push public opinion in favor of military action. This paper will focus on Brethren ideals of non-resistance in the Civil War era by studying a small sampling of men in Pennsylvania and Maryland. How did their religion shape their actions, and how different were those actions in comparison to the broader population? Did the war have any effect on their religious beliefs in turn, and if so, how?

Brethren are a people with a long history of nonviolence tracing back to their origins in Europe. The Brethren religion is part of the larger movement of Anabaptism, which originated in the region including Switzerland, Germanies, and the Netherlands around the 1520s and 1530s.<sup>1</sup> This group also included religious sects such as Mennonites, Hutterites, and eventually the Amish, and Anabaptist, they all believed in baptizing as adults, along with some additional key principles. Author Carl F. Bowman identified the eight main Mennonite-Anabaptist ideals that were included in Brethren doctrine as the following:

commitment to an unadulterated biblically based doctrine; fidelity to the New Testament ordinances of believer's baptism, the Lord's Supper, and footwashing; restriction of the Lord's Supper to those united within the fellowship; rejection of all use of force and violence (nonresistance); refusal to swear oaths of allegiance or truthfulness; the view that the church is a gathered community of believers living in close fellowship with one another; the loving use of mutual correction and discipline (including excommunication and the ban) to promote Christian living; and

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<sup>1</sup> Carl F. Bowman, *Brethren Society: The Cultural Transformation of a "Peculiar People,"* (The Johns Hopkins University Press: 1995), 4.; The information on the following page pertaining to the early history of the Brethren comes from Bowman, pages 3-8; 15; 77.

commitment to religious liberty—freedom of conscience to practice one's faith without state interference.

These principles did not align completely with the tolerated faiths in the German-Swiss region, primarily Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed. Additionally conflicts arose between the Anabaptist groups as well. When a Brethren married a daughter of a Mennonite minister in 1719 in Germany, the issue led to such division that a group of twenty Brethren families left for Pennsylvania. This group, led by Peter Becker, followed a precedent set by Krefeld Mennonites in the 1680s and settled in Germantown, near Philadelphia. Within a decade, more Brethren began immigrating to Pennsylvania after hearing positive accounts from past members. By the early 1730s, the migration to America had more or less been completed. The Brethren members who remained in Europe converted to other religions, so that by the nineteenth century no Brethren remained in Europe.

One of the central elements of maintaining Brethren ideals is gathering for Annual Meetings. These meetings have been a long-established practice in the Brethren faith, and help to unify the church on various issues and codify its beliefs. The first Annual Meeting can be traced back to around 1742, and by the 1770s the yearly gathering of members "became the guarantor of Brethren unity, the basis of church discipline, and the final authority in all church matters." All members are welcome to attend Annual Meetings, not solely elders or ministers, and decisions on matters would be discussed in relation to the scriptures until a unanimous consensus was reached. Therefore, the decisions marked in the Annual Meeting minutes were taken extremely seriously among congregations.

The Brethren faith was a highly organized religion, but its numbers were never large. The United States Census in 1860 showed a residential population of 31,443,321.<sup>2</sup> At this same time,

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<sup>2</sup> "Culture: 1860," United States Census Bureau, January 04, 2016.

the number of Brethren stood at a little under 20,000.<sup>3</sup> With less than .0006% of the national population, Brethren members' experiences were by definition anomalous, and was an exception to the majority of the nation. However, with the omnipresence of the Civil War, even this small group was affected. The events of the conflict did have some slight impact on Brethren ideology, but in the end they still remained steadfast to their overall beliefs during this time.

Although the number of Brethren in Pennsylvania was small, the state itself played a large role in the war. The southern part of the state, as well the border regions in Maryland, saw some of the hardest fighting on the eastern campaign in both Gettysburg and Antietam. Due to this heavy concentration of fighting, civilians, as well as soldiers, were placed in the thick of the war. Over 360,000 Pennsylvanians fought for the Union. Among the detrimental effects of the war was the reality that many did not return home to their families, and orphanages were created throughout the state to accommodate their children.<sup>4</sup>

Regardless of the high casualty rate, Pennsylvania was left as an economic powerhouse which set the state up to lead industrial arenas going forward. During the war, the state supplied about 80 percent of the Union's iron, as well as an abundance of anthracite coal, textiles, flour, and meat. Railroads across the state aided in transportation, and factories produced cannons, rifles, gunboats, and textiles long after the war. The end result were an increase in the number of factories, combined with advances in processes for those factories and for agriculture. All of these factors benefitted Pennsylvania's future economy.

The impact of the war in Pennsylvania is easier to calculate than for the small proportion of Brethren living there at the time. In order to examine the relation of the Civil War on the

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<sup>3</sup> Bowman, *Brethren Society*, 96.

<sup>4</sup> Jim Weeks, *Pennsylvania in the Civil War*, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1998, 1; 5. The ideas in the following paragraph additionally comes from Weeks, pages 4-5.

religion, this paper will explore various facets of Brethren life and thought. First, it is important to clearly define the idea of non-resistance for Brethren, and where this idea stands in their religion. Another bastion of Brethren belief, its disapproval of slavery, also needs to be examined more closely to understand the context approaching the Civil War. This section will also consider exceptions to this ideal, and how they impacted the region and those living in it. Considering how the war combined violence with opposition to slavery, the next part of the paper will look more closely at the Civil War itself and various views of the war. It will first explore the general American response to fight and its reasons to do so, followed by further explanations as to why the Brethren remained opposed to fighting, yet sympathized with the Northern cause. Specifically, religious opposition to war will be further described in detail in the next section. Finally, the paper will conclude by examining specific cases of those involved in the war, both Brethren men, and non-Brethren soldiers who converted to the religion after the war.

The selection of the research sample was chosen for particular reasons. It is in no way a random exploration, but rather investigates men in the Pennsylvania-Maryland region who had sufficient information about their lives and views to attract researchers. The region was also central to the Civil War, and included the locations of major battles.

While information about these men has long been widely available, Brethren involvement in the Civil War has not been extensively examined. Additionally, previously undiscussed letters that deal with wartime exemptions and experiences were found in the Hess Archives in Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania, and add largely unstudied and fresh perspectives in this paper. For these reasons, it is important to understand how Brethren men's stories fit into the bloodiest war in American history.

**Non-resistance for Brethren:**

As a pacifist religion, one of the main teachings that Brethren emphasize is their commitment to non-resistance. This idea is stressed in various scriptures—most notably in Matthew, Romans, and Acts—and is often discussed within the minutes of Annual Meetings, where prominent members of congregations from around the United States would gather to discuss common issues and questions about the faith. Together, they give definitive answers for where the religion stands on these issues, which is to be followed by all congregations.

Additional publications by nineteenth century Brethren B. F. Moomaw and S. F. Sanger illustrate how Brethren men continued this principle outside of official records and provide primary source material from this time period. While these statements are merely a selection of representative writings, they can reflect arguments made by countless other Brethren documents throughout time and in various areas, both in the North where many Annual Meetings were held, and Moomaw and Sanger's home state of Virginia.

Minutes from Annual Meetings reinforce the concept of nonresistance and can be found long before the 1860s, illustrating the consistency of Brethren to this idea. Dating back to issues raised from the Revolutionary War, the Brethren's persistence to not supporting one side was reiterated in 1783, when an Annual Meeting in Pipe Creek, Maryland refuted the argument that it was acceptable to participate in war, because Peter himself went to war.<sup>5</sup> Rejecting this claim, it stated that God had to give his consent to make a war just, and since He did not justify the current war outwardly as he had in the Bible, they could not fight.<sup>6</sup> Refusing to fight however,

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<sup>5</sup> "Minutes of the Annual Meetings of the Church of the Brethren: Containing all Available Minutes from 1778 to 1909," (Brethren Publishing House: 1-3 June 1909, Elgin, Illinois, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

placed Brethren on the outskirts of the general public. While the Brethren, especially in Maryland, held to their religious morals, their nonpartisanship translated as supporting British troops to many revolutionary future-Americans.<sup>7</sup> One example of the backlash that Brethren faced for their pacifism was the case of Christopher Sauer II, a Brethren minister in Germantown, Pennsylvania during the Revolution.<sup>8</sup> Due to Sauer's refusal to "swear allegiance to the American cause," revolutionary soldiers captured Sauer in May 1778, and kept him as a prisoner briefly in Valley Forge until late July. More importantly and more detrimental to his future was the additional punishment of the confiscation and loss of all of his assets.<sup>9</sup>

Arguably the struggles faced by non-resistant religious groups in the Revolutionary War paved the way for arguments made later in the 1860s. Questions of non-resistance were raised once more with the onset of the Civil War. In 1865, the Annual Meeting discussed many problems that had affected the congregations during the previous years of the war. At this meeting, they declared that one could never "take up arms," regardless of the circumstances.<sup>10</sup> Outside of Annual Meetings where elders gave their official say on issues, Brethren published their own reasons for being non-violent. Moomaw's essay, *The Inconsistency of War* emphasized the faith's persistence to peace in the face of war. Moomaw, born in Botetourt County, Virginia, converted to the Brethren faith around 1840, and became a minister and an elder by 1860.<sup>11</sup> He was able to use his position years later at the onset of the Civil War to stress Brethren ideologies, specifically their opposition to slavery, and the importance of nonresistance.<sup>12</sup> *The Inconsistency of War* was written as a debate between a "friend," who believes in taking up arms if provoked,

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<sup>7</sup> Bowman, *Brethren Society*, 17-18.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>10</sup> "Minutes of the Annual Meetings of the Church of the Brethren: Containing all Available Minutes from 1778 to 1909," (Brethren Publishing House: 1-3 June 1909, Elgin, Illinois), 235.

<sup>11</sup> *Brethren Encyclopedia*, Willard, Ohio: The Lakeside Press, 1983, 873.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*



and a “brother,” who uses numerous biblical passages to justify non-resistance in every situation. While the actual words are hypothetical, Moomaw argued that these were the main justifications for going to war that he had heard people discuss. Just as the minutes from the Annual Meetings had been impacted by events rippling through the country, Moomaw explicitly stated at the beginning of his essay that a major reason why he felt compelled to write a defense of Brethren beliefs was the attention drawn to it “within the last few years.”<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that, in line with his religion, Moomaw did not solely talk about Brethren in his essay, but rather believed that non-resistance should be practiced by all religions, be it Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. While he included other religions, the majority of his justifications relied on biblical passages and the life of Christ, clearly making this document a Christian text.

The New Testament offered one of the greatest arguments for non-resistance that Moomaw cited: the life of Christ. The essay emphasized the “Prince of Peace” and His spirit in juxtaposition to those who fight. He wrote, “all wars, especially all aggressive wars and fightings, are opposed to the spirit of the Gospel.” He went on to describe the importance of emulating Christ, further emphasizing that “Christ’s Spirit was not a fighting Spirit.” Moomaw cited two specific examples of Christ’s pacifism in the New Testament: the first when James and John asked Jesus to “punish their enemies,” and Jesus responded proclaiming that “the Son of Man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” The next example is when Peter wanted to take up arms for protection, and Christ “commanded him to put up his sword.”

While Moomaw stressed what he believed to be the New Testament’s endorsement of non-resistance, he also acknowledged the ubiquity of violence and war in the Old Testament. He

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<sup>13</sup> B. F. Moomaw, *The Inconsistencies of War: In all its Phases, when Viewed in the Light of the Divine Code, as Delivered to us in the New Testament, or Christian Constitution*, 220. Further analysis on Moomaw in the next few pages is attributed to his *Inconsistencies of War*, pages 221; 241-242; 257; 223-224; 253; and 244-245.

argued that such episodic bloodshed should not be used as justification for taking up arms. He reasoned that Joshua, Saul, and David, among others, were allowed to fight because God gave them explicit permission to do so. However, contemporary belligerents did not have this divine approval, and therefore there was no justification to fight. Moomaw also quoted Samuel 15:22-24, showing the difference between following God's lead and transgressing "because [they] feared the people and obeyed their [the people's] voice," making the distinction between worldly and holy powers. Legal justification in Moomaw's eyes was not enough to go to war, for he argued that only God can rightfully command one to do so.

While legal justification was not sufficient, neither was the argument that fighting back when attacked by others was a natural, God-given instinct. Some proponents of war claimed that God gave men their nature to fight back, and therefore it was just and noble to take up arms. Moomaw rejected this stance, while accepting that this predisposition for violence in fact exists and was inherited by Adam and Eve. However, he argued that a true Christian is able to overcome this initial reaction, and should never fight, even if provoked. He cited Cain and Able for his biblical example, claiming that Cain gave in to this side of human nature, while Able was able to rise above it and not fight back when his brother attacked him.

Broadly speaking, Moomaw's text illustrates the reasoning for Brethren to oppose taking up arms, especially during the Civil War, since that was the time period that inspired Moomaw's writing. Through various biblical passages and examples of Jesus's pacifism, the essay refutes common arguments made against nonresistance, most notably, that Christian ideology could make a claim to promote self-defense or going to war. Moomaw emphasized the importance of Jesus's teaching about peace and God's laws above secular ones.

Other defenses of nonresistance are found within Sanger's book, *The Olive Branch of Peace and Good Will to Men; Anti-War History of the Brethren and Mennonites, the Peace People of the South, During the Civil War 1861-1865*. Sanger, born in Rockingham County, Virginia, was known in Brethren communities as both a minister and a frequent Annual Meeting moderator. He went on to become an elder in Virginia, Indiana, and California, all places where he lived during his life. His desire to create a coordinated Brethren group is clearly seen in his 1908 attempt to "organize Brethren colonization in California without the assistance of railroad land agents."<sup>14</sup> Sanger's legacy is possibly best remembered through his contributions in *The Olive Branch*.

Sanger knew that in order to gain exemption from fighting wars in America, would-be conscientious objectors would need to prove that they had well-established religious scruples against violence. Seeing a lack of published material on this subject, he wrote this piece, published in 1907, to serve as southern Brethren's need for avoiding wars.<sup>15</sup> He cited various biblical passages, such as the reference in Isaiah 9:6 to Christ as the "Prince of Peace," and "Resist not evil" in Matthew 5:39.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, he quoted Matthew for a passage including "love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and prosecute you."<sup>17</sup> These several passages aid to bolster the Brethren belief of refusing to fight, even after provoked.

In addition to primary sources from Brethren men, scholars outside the faith have noted the principles which the Brethren faith are built on, especially the notion of nonresistance and

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<sup>14</sup> *Brethren Encyclopedia*, 1143.

<sup>15</sup> S. F. Sanger, *The Olive Branch of Peace and Good Will to Men; Anti-War History of the Brethren and Mennonites, the Peace People of the South, During the Civil War 1861-1865*, Brethren Publishing House: 1907, Elgin, Illinois, 83.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 23; 26.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

separation of mainstream American ideas. Bridgewater College historian Stephen Longenecker identified many of these founding values in his 2013 book, *Gettysburg Religion: Refinement, Diversity, and Race in the Antebellum and Civil War Border North*, which detailed the experience of several Brethren families who lived in Gettysburg during the war, including the Sherfys, and a Lutheran family, the Schmuckers.

The first case study that Longenecker discussed, Samuel Simon Schmucker, was a Lutheran minister who preached in Gettysburg during the Antietam campaign.<sup>18</sup> While not a Brethren himself, his sermons showed how Christian teachings began to evolve with the approach of the war. Similar to Moomaw's argument of nonviolence in the face of aggression, Schmucker also emphasized the "evil of war" and that "these fighting men produced nothing while requiring the 'labor of others' for support." While this was the original position taken, Longenecker observed a shift over time, and after the Union victory in Gettysburg, Schmucker's sermons had become less set in Christian ways, and tilted towards supporting the Union, claiming that "God had chosen [the Union]'s side."

While Schmucker's sermons were just one case of Christian preaching in Gettysburg, as a whole Brethren ideals were also undergoing the same tensions in the region. These stresses could be tested and best observed through enlistment. Their commitment to nonresistance mandated that Brethren could not take up arms, nor take an oath to serve in the army. Longenecker explained that avoiding enlistment was not an issue during the very beginning of the war due to the enthusiasm of the general public. With enough men volunteering, there was no need for a draft until the first full year of the war in 1862, where the rising death tolls and unnerving stories

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<sup>18</sup> Steve Longenecker, *Gettysburg Religion: Refinement, Diversity, and Race in the Antebellum and Civil War Border North*, (Fordham University Press: 2014), 164-165. The following information about the Schmucker and Sherfy families is also from Longenecker, pages 165-166.

of the front lines compromised enrollments and forced Congress to make stringent draft laws. Longenecker observed that Brethren ideals held steadfast after the more stringent regulations were placed, especially seen in reports from Yearly Meetings, and this persistence to nonviolence allowed them to gain exemptions through being labeled conscientious objectors. The consistent response towards violence and war made it easier for the government to recognize Brethren practices as a part of their religious history and tradition, and thus made it easier for Brethren men to gain exemptions.

The story of Raphael Sherfy illustrates the process that one would endure to be labeled a conscientious objector. Sherfy and several other Brethren in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania were selected for the draft, and instead of serving proved that they were conscientious objectors. However, they also had to pay a commutation fee, usually a charge of \$300 given to the government in lieu of service. This was a common practice for men of various pacifist religions, such as Mennonite, Amish, and River Brethren, and many prominent non-pacifists were also able to pay the commutation fee to avoid service as well.

At the Marsh Creek congregation just outside of Gettysburg, a quite different situation arose. Rather than attempting to gain exemption, two Brethren men were punished for their actions supporting the Union Army, as evidenced by an 1864 Brethren council meeting at Marsh Creek. One man was drafted, and chose to go into service instead of paying the acceptable commutation fee; the other had professed his intent to join in order to receive the money incentive. The first man was expelled from the community, and the other one was restricted from participation in communion and voting in council meetings. The events at Marsh Creek illustrate clearly how important the idea of nonresistance was to some Brethren communities, and the punishments for rejecting this element in their religion.

## Brethren Opposition to Slavery

As adherence to non-resistance for Brethren living in Pennsylvania and Maryland was stressed in the mid-nineteenth century, the Brethren stance on slavery was equally highlighted. The faith had always emphasized a strong opposition to slavery, citing biblical passages. Additionally, Brethren members living in those states were often surrounded by neighbors with similar ideas on the injustice and impracticality of slavery, since the institution was steadily dying out in the North. There were, however, still some cases of Brethren owning slaves, but they were by and large exceptional. Slaves were sometimes held until they reached a legal age for manumission—either 18 or 21—in addition to the official declaration of disapproval of slavery, illustrating how the overarching Brethren opinion believed slavery to be a great moral sin, similar to other Evangelical abolitionists at the time. Ultimately, issues of the Civil War overlapped partially with Brethren rejection of slavery, aligning their stance more so with the Union, although their beliefs of nonresistance maintained a neutral position.

As previously stated, Brethren opposition to slavery is largely rooted in its teachings and biblical passages. Summarizing their views on the matter, elders in 1863 explicitly wrote that “the Brethren always believed, and believe yet, that slavery is a great evil, and contrary of Christ, we consider it utterly wrong for a brother to justify slavery, either in public or in private, and that he should be admonished, and if obstinate, shall be dealt with according to Matt. 18.”<sup>19</sup> This principle can be seen in earlier articles as well, such as the 1782 Annual Meeting, where elders wrote that it was “unanimously considered that it [slavery] cannot be permitted in any way by the church, that a member should or could purchase negros, or keep them as slaves.”<sup>20</sup> This ruling

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<sup>19</sup> Minutes of the Annual Meetings of the Church of the Brethren, 219.

<sup>20</sup> Jeff Bach, "The Unchristian Negro Slave Trade: Brethren and Slavery," *Brethren Life and Thought*, 56 (2011), 3.

was mirrored again decades later during the 1862 Annual Meeting, which reported that Brethren ministers cannot defend or justify slavery.<sup>21</sup>

Regardless of the official stance taken by the Brethren at Annual Meetings, the issue of slavery occasionally made its way into Brethren congregations, and was dealt with according to their strong religious teachings. In the few cases where Brethren members owned slaves, their congregations typically encouraged them to free them once they were of legal age. Otherwise, if the former slaves wished to stay under the protection of their Brethren owners, they would be expected to provide paid jobs for the individuals.<sup>22</sup> With precedents dating back to the 1770s, this practice had been well established by the 1860s. An early example was the 1782 case of John van Lawschet of the Conestoga congregation in Pennsylvania. Van Lawschet owned one slave woman and her four children, and after failing to free them as he claimed he would, his situation was discussed in the 1782 Annual Meeting. There, the elders reiterated their stance against owning slaves.<sup>23</sup> Not only was van Lawschet to manumit his slaves once they reached the age of 21, but he was also required to provide them with an education, food, bedding, and a new set of clothing upon being freed.

Annual Meetings were explicit in their rejection of slavery, as seen in the van Lawschet case and other meeting minutes. In Washington County, Tennessee in 1846, Elders differentiated between Brethren selling their slaves so they were no longer in possession of them, as opposed to freeing them. The region itself was known to strongly support Northern interests, which may have made Brethren opinions against slavery stronger in this area. They ruled that those who sold their slaves instead of outright freeing them did not comply with Brethren beliefs. Moreover

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<sup>21</sup> Minutes of the Annual Meetings of the Church of the Brethren, 207.

<sup>22</sup> Bach, "Unchristian Negro Slave Trade," 3. The following paragraphs about Brethren men who owned slaves can be attributed to Bach, pages 3-7.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

“every effort in his [the slaveholder’s] power to liberate” slaves must be made to agree with the church.

Even with their strong stance against slavery, Brethren communities tended not to welcome African Americans into their congregations. However, Annual Meeting minutes acknowledged that there should be an equal treatment regardless of race for Brethren members, but said that the decision was ultimately up to the specific churches. While Brethren believed in equality in theory, in reality, their hesitance towards mixed races in churches was just as profound as the general public was at this time.

While the inclusion of former slaves in Brethren congregations was by no means a common occurrence, it did happen. The story of Samuel Weir was one of the more well-known cases of a former slave to convert to the Brethren faith. Born in Virginia, he was sold to the McClure family who later became Brethren, and as such manumitted Weir. A nearby elder, B. F. Moomaw, whose opinions of slavery were discussed earlier, was aware of the dangers of slave catchers in Virginia who would apprehend ex-slaves and attempt to sell them later. Moomaw had wished to free his father’s slaves after he had converted as well, and donated the inheritance left by his father to the African Colonization Society.<sup>24</sup> Because of his uneasiness about the potentially-dangerous situation, Moomaw accompanied Weir to Ohio in 1843, “where he had a far better chance of remaining free.”<sup>25</sup> Weir used his freedom to convert and join the Brethren faith, and later went on to become the first African-American Brethren elder.<sup>26</sup>

Not every converted individual manumitted their slaves after becoming Brethren, and even some established Brethren families owned slaves regardless of orders from the Annual

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 4; Brethren Encyclopedia, 873.

<sup>25</sup> Bach, “The Unchristian Negro Slave Trade,” 5.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



Meeting. In fact, the Brethren practice of buying slaves with the intention of freeing them, while against the official Brethren rulings, marginally existed up into the Civil War. One such case is the Otto family who lived outside of Sharpsburg, Maryland.<sup>27</sup> The Ottos, a well-off Brethren family, were able to purchase a slave woman, “Aunt” Nancy, and her son, Hilary Watson, in the early 1830s when Watson was ten months old. An interview of the eighty-year-old Watson conducted by author Clifton Johnson gives further information about the relationship of the Ottos and Watson. With the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862, John Otto, the head of the family, saw that as reason to free his slaves, despite the fact that the Proclamation had no legal status in the state of Maryland since it was not part of the Confederacy. Instead Otto offered to the family’s former slaves the option to stay with the family and receive payment for their work. According to Watson, his owner’s son said to him ““now, Hilary, you’re your own man. Pap wants to hire you, but you can go and work wherever you please. If you decide to go away, and it happens that by and by you have nothin’ to do, come back and make your home with us.” At other points in the interview, Watson painted John Otto as “a good man to his black people,” and spoke of the relatively fair treatment he received there, such as being able to live in the same house as the white family and eat the same foods, although in a separate room. It is an interesting situation, because the Ottos were explicitly disobeying their religion by buying and owning slaves, yet appeared to treat their slaves relatively well.

Shortly after Watson was freed, he was drafted into the Union Army. While it is uncertain, it is possible that his draft call was tied to the recent declaration of the Emancipation Proclamation.<sup>28</sup> Instead of being sent off to fight, Otto had asked Watson if he wanted to join the

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<sup>27</sup> Clifton Johnson, *Battleground Adventures in the Civil War: The Stories of Dwellers on the Scenes of Conflict in Some of the Most Notable Battles of the Civil War*, (Houghton Mifflin Company: 1915), 104.; The following analysis of Watson’s story comes from the information and language found in Johnson, pages 104-105.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 105; Bach, 11.

war effort. When Watson replied that he did not want to go, John Otto paid the commutation fee of three hundred dollars for his former slave.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, while the Otto family, by dint of owning slaves, did not follow Brethren teachings, they clearly bonded and cared about their slaves. As seen by previous cases, the Otto family should have manumitted their slaves as soon as they were of age, and Watson believed he was around 30 years old at the time of the Civil War. It is also interesting that Watson and his mother were not Brethren themselves, nor did they affiliate themselves with the church after manumission.<sup>30</sup> It is uncertain why John Otto and his family held their slaves so long, especially when their actions of purchasing slaves and not manumitting them was opposed to Brethren teachings. Apart from these occasional exceptions, slavery was not tolerated among the Brethren. The long history of opposing slavery reflected in Annual Meeting minutes dating back to the eighteenth century illustrates how engrained this principle was in the faith.

### **Views of War**

While it may have been difficult for the Brethren of certain areas to stand apart from American society before the war, the nationalistic views of the general public made their ideological differences even starker. Yet it also mildly changed some stances of individual Brethren. To begin to understand the relations in the social climate of the 1860s, one must first examine how both Brethren and non-Brethren viewed the war, and their justifications for either abstaining or fighting.

While there were many causes of the war, several tensions seem to repeatedly be cited by both the Union and Confederacy, the most prominent being the issue of slavery. It is generally

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<sup>29</sup> Johnson, 105.

<sup>30</sup> Bach, "The Unchristian Negro Slave Trade," 12.

understood that a combination of slavery, states' rights, and stereotypes of their enemy fueled the flames of conflict between the North and South.

Slavery undoubtedly was the most influential factor used to drum up support for either side, and is illustrated by Union recruitment posters.<sup>31</sup> One poster showed a Union soldier holding the flag with a banner over it reading "Freedom to the Slave" in the foreground. Behind him, former slave children were attending a public school, an African American man put down his plow and was reading a newspaper, and countless others exulted in having their chains broken by Union soldiers before ripping apart the Confederate flag under their feet.<sup>32</sup> This propaganda poster, along with many similar pieces, alluded to how the North attempted to use a moral argument to support its cause. It presented African Americans contrary to stereotypical images at the time, and emphasized humane and civilized characteristics so it would seem wrong to place other humans at such a low status as they saw in bondage.

The South also cited slavery as a main reason why it fought against the Union. The vice-president of the Confederate States of America, Alexander Stephens, claimed in his famous Cornerstone Speech that "'African slavery...was the immediate cause of the late rupture and present revolution,' and stated that the Confederate government was based upon 'the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery...is his natural and normal condition.'" <sup>33</sup> The Confederacy, therefore, used the protection of slavery as a way to call for more support in the South just as the North had, just using a polar opposite viewpoint.

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<sup>31</sup> John Spicer, "'The Cause' of the American Civil War," *History Review* no. 49 (September 2004): Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost, 45.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Alexander Stephens, "Cornerstone Speech," University of Louisiana at Lafayette, March 8, 2016. <http://www.ucs.louisiana.edu/~ras2777/amgov/stephens.html>.

With the issue of slavery serving as a call to war for both sides, Brethren ideals of nonresistance and their opposition to slavery culminated in a conflicted view of the Civil War. While Annual Meetings stood firm in their rejection of supporting the war in any way, the Union's stance on slavery reflected Brethren opinion of the "peculiar institution."<sup>34</sup> This similarity put many Brethren in an interesting situation. Clearly they aligned their views with the North regarding slavery. However, their firm stance of nonresistance meant that they would not support the war in any capacity. In a letter from non-Brethren lawyer Nathaniel Ellmaker to Brethren minister Samuel Ruhl Zug in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Ellmaker updated Zug on the struggles the North was facing. He followed by writing, "but ours is a just cause [and] we must hope on."<sup>35</sup> It can be assumed that the idea of this "just cause" influenced Brethren as much as it did with the general population in the North. This juxtaposition served as an undercurrent in the actions of many Brethren at the time, and can be viewed through observing minutes from the Annual Meetings.

Almost all groups, Brethren or otherwise, were influenced by the moral ideas that drove Northern opinion of the war, and with it, created a more nationalistic attitude. Longenecker acknowledged the impact of an increase of these nationalistic views during the Civil War. He writes, "Even the...[Brethren], who before the war were so far outside the political mainstream that they discouraged voting, caught a whiff of civil religion and lined up behind the Union, though still affirming their longstanding nonresistant principles."<sup>36</sup> He notes as well that the Yearly Meeting reports show how Brethren communities were leaning towards the Northern

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<sup>34</sup> Spicer, "'The Cause' of the American Civil War," 48.

<sup>35</sup> Nathaniel Ellmaker to Samuel Ruhl Zug, September 4, 1862, Box 1, Folder 1, Samuel Ruhl Zug Papers 1856-1924, Hess Archives, Elizabethtown College High Library.

<sup>36</sup> Longenecker, *Gettysburg Religion*, 6.

cause and its ideals.<sup>37</sup> The 1865 Annual Meeting in Rock River, Illinois went so far as to state that there was no tolerance for Brethren who supported slavery or spoke ill of the “rulers of our land in public...especially of President Lincoln.”<sup>38</sup> It is possible that Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation of 1862 influenced Brethren opinion on the war.

Even though this nationalistic influence seeped into the Annual Meetings, many elders upheld the faith’s long-standing commitment to nonresistance, and punished those who joined the war effort. Such stances from Annual Meetings were common, and dated back to the Revolutionary War, where elders held to their refusal to take up arms for either side. In 1781, elders at the Annual Meeting in Conestoga, Pennsylvania declared that they would not participate in any war for America, and additionally would not give substitutes. Less than a decade later in 1790, Elders in Coventry, Pennsylvania argued that their opposition to swearing oaths made it impossible for them to participate in wars.

With the coming of the Civil War, these ideals were restated at various Annual Meetings. In the minutes for the 1865 Annual Meeting in Rock River, Illinois, Elders commented on the right to bear arms. They declared that it was never justified to “take up arms” even “when called upon to do so by the authorities, in order to sustain civil government.” Considering the date of the meeting, this comment can be assumed to be in reference to the Civil War and the United States government requiring men to join the fight. In the same year, a meeting declared in one of its articles that if Brethren men were to be put into the army and took up arms, they could no longer be members of a congregation. Additional examples of this can be seen in the previously-discussed case of the drafted men in Marsh Creek, Pennsylvania, and the punishments of

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>38</sup> Minutes of the Annual Meetings of the Church of the Brethren, 242.; The following discussion on Annual Meeting responses come from information in the Minutes of the Annual Meetings of the Church of the Brethren, pages 14; 235; 237; and 230.

expulsion from the community or suspended for their choice to fight in the war. An 1863 Annual Meeting in Blair County, Pennsylvania stated that those in military service should not be allowed to be baptized. They reasoned, “we cannot encourage such proceedings,” though they lessened their stance slightly by adding, “but in case of extreme sickness, and when there is a promise to shed no more blood, we will let the churches applied to decide what shall be done.”

Not only did the Annual Meetings reinforce general Brethren opinions of the war, but publications of Brethren members highlights their reasons for opposing war. Moomaw’s book, *The Inconsistencies of War*, specifically discussed issues and arguments that he believed needed to be addressed with the omnipresence of the Civil War over the United States.

One of the central claims that Moomaw cited is James 4:1, which stated that lust, desire of other’s possessions, and aspirations of glory are the key causes of war.<sup>39</sup> Not only should true Christians be opposed to violence and evil—therefore “nonviolent”—but they should not try to resist the violent, thereby being “non-resistant.” Additionally, the passages “let him take,” and “resist not evil,” were often cited as reasons to be passive in the face of others’ aggression.

With the rising nationalistic atmosphere in the 1860s, the idea of “proper” patriotism is also discussed in *The Inconsistencies of War*. Instead of defining patriotism as a “love of country,” Moomaw was much more specific, feeling that God still has to come before loyalty to state. He wrote, “In a word, true patriotism is that love to our country that after our duty to God, we should discharge faithfully all our duties to our country, where such duty does not conflict with our duty to God.” Further developing this point, Moomaw cited Peter’s statement about government, saying “we should obey God rather than men.” He also emphasized the New

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<sup>39</sup> Moomaw, *The Inconsistencies of War*, 222.; Moomaw’s arguments discussed in the following pages can be attributed to pages 229; 260; 230-235.

Testament's vision of legal right and moral behavior, arguing that the punishments that Jesus and the martyrs endured were technically legal, yet morally wrong.

Moomaw also explicitly addressed the new draft and the government's ability to enact such laws. He wrote, "there are other considerations that I think oblige us, as citizens, to give our aid to the defense, as well as to the support of the country, because it is a right awarded to all governments, by the law of nations, to make such rules and regulations." However, Moomaw, went on to explain that "we are morally bound, as loyal citizens, to acquiesce and cooperate with those arrangements, and as citizens claiming the protection of the government under which we live, we out to be subject to and defend that government." He additionally argued that government still needs to respect religious rights. Therefore, the justification for both sides' actions is a matter of if one is "looking at the subject from a moral or political stand-point."

### **Religious Opposition to War**

With a less nationalistic and patriotic view of the Civil War, Brethren sought to gain conscientious objector status that fit with their strong belief in nonviolence. One of the most valuable primary sources to understand Brethren opposition to the war is letters between Brethren members attempting to gain exemptions from fighting and non-Brethren lawyers. Samuel Ruhl Zug, a minister in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, communicated with Nathaniel Ellmaker, a lawyer in the area who worked in cooperation with the Brethren to establish their status as conscientious objectors.<sup>40</sup> While only Ellmaker's letters survive, they show what would have been common questions and concerns for Zug's congregation.

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<sup>40</sup> Ellmaker to Zug, September 4, 1862, Samuel Ruhl Zug Papers, 1.

Zug was born in 1832 in Mastersonville, Lancaster County, and was a minister and elder of the Church of the Brethren in both Pennsylvania and Maryland.<sup>41</sup> After working as a surveyor and real estate agent, Zug was called to the ministry in White Oak in 1865. In 1868 White Oak organized the Chiques Congregation where Zug became minister. He went on to become elder in 1885. In 1891, he became an elder at Lancaster City Church from 1891 to 1899. He was also an elder for York, Codorus, Harrisburg, Philadelphia, West Green Tree, Elizabethtown, and Ridgely, Maryland congregations. Zug often attended Brethren meetings and Annual Meeting Committees both in and out of state, and did missionary work in eastern Pennsylvania.

Zug illuminated the main concerns of Brethren in one letter, dated September 4, 1862, which discussed both Brethren objections to the war and the requirements that would allow drafted men to avoid entry into service. Ellmaker alluded to a clause in the Constitution that Zug focused on in a missing letter—possibly the Establishment Clause, although it is uncertain—which would protect religious groups from being forced by the government to act in ways contrary to their religious beliefs.<sup>42</sup> Ellmaker wrote, “The clause of the constitution referred to by you, takes in all of the class, who conscientiously scruple to bear arms is by no means confined to those actually belonging to religious denominations holding views of noncombatants.” Ellmaker went on to explain that it is easier for men wishing to gain conscientious objection status if they are an official member of a group, possibly implying that those not baptized in the faith would have a more difficult time avoiding the draft. However, there were possibly other ways to prove candidates’ belief in nonviolence besides being an official member. Ellmaker wrote, “other testimony can be had to establish the fact.” Ellmaker seemed to be working with

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<sup>41</sup> Brethren Encyclopedia, 1401.; The following biographical information on Zug can be found in the Brethren Encyclopedia.

<sup>42</sup> Ellmaker to Zug, September 4, 1862, Samuel Ruhl Zug Papers, 1. The next page dealing with the two men’s correspondence similarly comes from their September 4, 1862 letter, pages 1-2.



Zug not only to ensure he knows how to secure exemptions for the men in his congregation, but also to clarify the legal hurdles and loopholes that could be exploited.

Besides meeting the religious requirements for obtaining a legal exemption from joining the war, Ellmaker also discussed commutation fees. There seemed to have been discrepancies between Ellmaker's views and those of Pennsylvania Governor Andrew G. Curtin's at the time regarding how much conscientious objectors should pay the government in lieu of service. Ellmaker wrote to Zug that he believed the cost for "personal service" was around \$16 a month, and so for a term of nine months it should equate to around \$144. However, he followed this estimate by stating, "this was my impression, but our Governor thinks there is no clear provision upon this subject—I will therefore invoke legislation at the next session to fix the amount." This passage illustrates that even in 1862, the cost of avoiding the war was not certain. Zug most likely had proposed the question to the lawyer in a previous letter, as Ellmaker followed the section about the commutation fees with "this is a great deal shorter letter than you seem to call for, yet being done, I've nothing more to add ref. your inquiry."

Several months later, on July 16, 1863, Zug received another letter from Ellmaker updating him on the standards necessary for "conscientious scruples" after new restrictions were added with the Conscription Act of 1863.<sup>43</sup> This letter could also have been in reference to Ellmaker's earlier promise to "invoke legislation at the next session" and inform Zug on the amount necessary to obtain an exception to the draft.<sup>44</sup> He began by explaining that those drafted would have 10 days to present a case to the Board of Enrollment, but assured Zug that Brethren making a case "will I think be exempted."<sup>45</sup> The Conscription Act stipulated that those who had

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<sup>43</sup> Nathaniel Ellmaker to Samuel Ruhl Zug, July 16, 1863, Box 1, Folder 1, Samuel Ruhl Zug Papers 1856-1924, Hess Archives, Elizabethtown College High Library, 1.

<sup>44</sup> Ellmaker to Zug, September 4, 1862, Samuel Ruhl Zug Papers 1.

<sup>45</sup> Ellmaker to Zug, July 16, 1863, Samuel Ruhl Zug Papers, 1.

already gained exemption in the past year would need to meet the restrictions of the new Act as well.<sup>46</sup> Ellmaker explained that the exempted individual would need to have a medical reason that he could not fight, provide a substitute, or pay \$300.<sup>47</sup> He further voiced his personal objection to the proposition of the Act that was presented the House of Representatives, and even told Zug that he “wrote to a prominent member objecting,” although the \$300 fine was already established.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the provisions of the Conscription Act, Brethren leaders were still determined to avoid fighting in the war. When the subject of Brethren participation was brought up in the 1863 Annual Meeting, Elders responded that they would not discuss the matter at all, and if further information was needed, that “the gospel gave sufficient instruction” about the matter.<sup>49</sup> Despite such official statements, however, Brethren were not entirely neutral in the war. In minutes of the 1865 Annual Meeting in Rock River, Illinois, elders explicitly stated that those who sided with the Confederacy and against Lincoln were “transgressors of the word” and should “make satisfactory acknowledgement to the church.”<sup>50</sup> By declaring that simply not agreeing with the Union was considered an offense to the church, the elders clearly had taken sides with the North.

This bias towards the North seemed to permeate to individual Brethren as well. A diary begun in 1862 by seventeen-year-old Cyrus Bucher reflected upon the war at the end of each year, and shows that he viewed himself as part of the Northern cause. Bucher was a farmer in Lebanon County, Pennsylvania, and would later move to central Illinois and become a Brethren minister. The majority of the passages deal with everyday tasks of farming or schooling, or

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Minutes of the Annual Meetings of the Church of the Brethren, 218.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 242.

discuss illnesses in the community. However, several sections show that while the war did not affect day-to-day activities, the undercurrent of the conflict was always there. While many of Bucher's observations about the war are mundane and obvious to the modern reader, deeper examinations reveal many aspects about the relationship between the war and Brethren congregations.

The first mention of the war was in an entry from December 1862. Bucher was reflecting on the previous year and "Miscellaneous Occurrences" that had not made it into his daily entries.<sup>51</sup> After discussing how this year had been hard on him and his town due to illness, he continued, saying, "During this year the times were very unpleasing to the majority of the people on account of the civil war that prevailed." He described the onset of the war as being a result of the election of Lincoln, and "commenced [war] in 1861 and no end is to be seen yet." Bucher then reflected on the high casualty count: by his estimate about one hundred thousand. He also listed the key battles in the past year.

The interesting sections of Bucher's entry were how he discussed both Lincoln and the Union. In addition to attributing the war to Lincoln's election, Bucher also quoted the President, clearly illustrating that he was well-informed on Lincoln's politics. Not only does the young farmer seem to have a strong interest in Lincoln, but he also may have seen himself as part of the North's cause. When describing the battle of Richmond, Bucher wrote, "it lasted seven days and our forces were driven from Richmond." The specific word choice—"our forces," instead of "Northern forces"—illustrates that Bucher subconsciously or not aligned himself with the Union, regardless of the Brethren stance of neutrality.

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<sup>51</sup> Cyrus Bucher, *Personal Diary*, (Lebanon County, Pennsylvania: 1862-1865), 47; Excerpts and information from Bucher's diary can be found on pages 47-48; 74; 90.

The following year, the war was getting closer to Bucher's community. One example of the influence the war was having in their town was when Bucher wrote briefly on August 19, 1863 that drafted soldiers returned home. It is only one sentence in that day's entry, and as such there is no mention of if these men were Brethren or just members of the community. Regardless, it was enough of a significant event that Bucher felt the need to record it in his journal, and one can deduce that these men returning home impacted the Brethren in the area.

Several months later, Bucher discussed the war once more as part of his reflection on 1863. As in the previous year, he believed that the war was not about to end any time soon, but then commented on the lack of volunteers. He wrote, "The people got tired of enlisting. Whether it was because the President proclaimed the negroes free or because they thought it best to make peace is not truly ascertained yet. But I do not believe it was for want of patriotism." It is possible that Bucher is projecting his own beliefs on the war and the importance of nonviolence onto the general public when he wrote that he believed some men "thought it best to make peace," instead of not wanting to go in the front lines.

Bucher then wrote about the direct result of this problem—the draft. With the war continuing, Bucher wrote, "I think this war will not be over till Abraham Lincoln will be out of office," and went on to show the necessary measures the President did to try and progress the war's end. One action that Bucher discussed in some depth was when Lincoln "ordered 600,000 people to be drafted, and another proclamation is out for three hundred thousand more." Bucher observed many men in his community get drafted, and the shifting requirements for avoiding war. He noted, "By the first draft they [drafted Brethren men] had to furnish substitutes and by the last they had to pay three hundred dollars." Bucher then listed over a dozen names of

community members that had to pay the commutation fee, showing how the draft had brought the war even closer to his congregation.

Additionally in this entry, Bucher wrote about the specific military battles. Despite the community members gaining exemption after being drafted, Bucher's writing reinforced the idea that he considered himself a part of the Union. He speaks of "the ground gained by *our* forces," when speaking of Grant's military successes.<sup>52</sup> As before, it seems that living in a Northern state and being exposed to Union rhetoric had an influence on some Brethren members. Reviewing the various entries in Bucher's diary, one can see that although the Brethren strived to remain neutral in the war, they were by no means entirely unaffected by the conflict between the states.

### **Those involved in the War**

Although Brethren communities were against war and practiced nonresistance, Brethren families often could not avoid the fighting. Mary and Joseph Sherfy lived with their six children one mile south of Gettysburg, on Emmittsburg Road.<sup>53</sup> Joseph, a preacher, was active in the church, and often represented his congregation at Annual Meetings. The Sherfys's stance on nonresistance was tested in the summer of 1863 when the Battle of Gettysburg literally brought the war to their doorstep. Over the three days of the battle, the Sherfys's land was vital in the fighting and after skirmishes, and the family's resolve to remain nonresistant, even refusing self-defense, speaks to their commitment to their faith.

The Sherfys did not leave their home until early in the morning on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, spending over a full day near the line of fire—bullets struck the fence outside their house, and a stray

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 90. Emphasis added.

<sup>53</sup> Longenecker, *Gettysburg Religion*, 128. The following section of the Sherfy family contains information found in Longenecker, pages 129; 146; 148-149.

bullet hit the skirts of Mary Sherfy's mother, Catherine Heagan. The Sherfys relocated to nearby Littlestown only after a Union officer ordered the family to leave for its own safety. Later that same day, Sherfy's peach orchard was used as strategic high ground for the Union army, though the South was able to drive the North back. Northern soldiers also took advantage of the Sherfys's house to shelter sharpshooters before the Confederates "captured fifty enlisted men and four officers on the property." Finally, the Sherfy property was also utilized after the battle to house wounded soldiers, both in the cellar and the barn.

The example of the Sherfy family illustrates how the violence from the war affected some of the Brethren in the region. Regardless of the proximity of the war, in this case, the violence appears to have reinforced the values of the faith. As far as the evidence shows, the Sherfys never participated in the battle as it was approaching their doorstep, nor did they resist when the Union officer asked them to leave their home. While a non-Brethren family may have done the same in this situation, it is important to note that the idea of nonresistance is a strong pillar of Brethren faith, and therefore defying the officer's request would have conflicted with their religious beliefs. Additionally, the Sherfy family is just one example throughout the war, but their story demonstrates how the collision of the war with Brethren ideologies impacted and reinforced their ideology.

While the Sherfy family remained nonresistant in the face of the violence taking place on their property, other Brethren chose to be involved in the war. To become an official member of the Brethren faith, one needs to be baptized, usually as an adult. Therefore, for those members of the community who were not yet baptized and joined the war effort, the elders technically could not punish them since they were not yet considered members of the Brethren faith. However, as previously discussed, there was much discussion on the procedures for those members who

asked to be baptized once in the service of the army. One of the concluding questions from the 1864 Annual Meeting addressed in Article 28 stressed that in extreme cases, the local churches would be able to determine if the individual was genuine in their desire to hold true to the faith's principles and become baptized.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, while participation in the war was often frowned upon in Annual Meetings, the Elders were still lenient to a degree regarding certain variables, especially if the person in question was willing to renounce his former violent actions.

While the issues brought up at Annual Meeting shows that there were Brethren who fought in the war against the faith's preaching, it is more difficult to find accounts of their experiences. In one rare letter from David S. Gunderman to Samuel Ruhl Zug, Gunderman elaborates on his experience with the 179 Regiment.<sup>55</sup> The regiment was included with the drafted militia, and saw a skirmish at Baltimore Cross Roads in July 1863, but otherwise moved around Virginia and southern Pennsylvania, losing six men to disease.<sup>56</sup> It is uncertain if Gunderman was Brethren himself, but he certainly knew Zug, who was a minister in central Pennsylvania in the 1860s; not only did he take the time to write a lengthy letter, but he also ended one page by writing "give my best respects to all my inquiring friends."<sup>57</sup> It is possible that he and his "inquiring friends" may not have been Brethren, rather Zug would have known and had regular contact with these potentially non-Brethren as well, especially with his extensive evangelical work in the region. There is no record of Gunderman in Brethren Encyclopedias, and we do not know if he defied Brethren teachings or not. However, at no point in the letter does Gunderman explicitly mention fighting first-hand, so it is still possible that, even if drafted, he

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<sup>54</sup> Minutes of the Annual Meetings of the Church of the Brethren, 230.

<sup>55</sup> David Gunderman to Samuel Ruhl Zug, December 16, 1862, Samuel Ruhl Zug Papers, Hess Archives, Elizabethtown College High Library, 6; Gunderman's name also appears as "Gundreman" throughout the letter, but to maintain consistency, the spelling on his signature will be used throughout the paper.

<sup>56</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, "Battle Unit Details: 179th Regiment," National Parks Service, January 31, 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Gundermant to Zug, Samuel Ruhl Zug Papers, 4; 6.

was able to avoid violence if he was in fact Brethren. Regardless of his official religious ties, Gunderman seemed to have a somewhat close connection with Zug, and the details pertaining to his regiment and the fact that it was addressed to a Brethren minister are significant.

One possible connection to Zug lies through Gunderman's wife. Born Sarah Geib, her name was common amongst Brethren, especially in Lebanon County, where the couple were buried. This information, combined with Gunderman's informal tone in his letters to Zug, implies that she may have been Brethren, or her family was at some point; therefore Zug, who often traveled around the area as a minister, may have crossed paths with the Geib and Gunderman families and stayed in contact with them.<sup>58</sup> While it is impossible to know if this is in fact the connection between the two men, it is likely.

Gunderman was writing in December 1862 from various locations around Virginia. He began the letter in Newport News, Virginia, and mentioned leaving Harrisburg, as well as passing through Baltimore, and Washington, and ended the letter in York.<sup>59</sup> Most of the letter detailed the army's treatment and supplies—a good breakfast or pudding and sausage as opposed to cakes given on the street. This meal, Gunderman wrote, “made me sick[. I] think there was poison in them.” In an additional note that was added to the end of the letter, conditions seemed to have worsened after leaving Newport News and marching to York. He wrote, “living has [been] po[o]r since we got her[e.] There is nothing her[e] but coffee and a few crackers but we hope that it will get bet[t]er.” Besides discussing his military diet, he talked about the weather, especially in relation to how it would be “up with you all,” once again implying that Gunderman knew a large group around where Zug was ministering. Other common conversational topics

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<sup>58</sup> "David S Gundreman (1840-1923)." Ancestry.com. Accessed February 22, 2016.

<sup>59</sup> Gunderman to Zug, Samuel Ruhl Zug Papers, 1-7. The analysis of Gunderman's letters relies on pages 1-7 of the Gunderman correspondence



were covered in the letter, such as the daily routine and the times that they have company drill, dinner, roll call, and supper.

In addition to common pleasantries, Gunderman also described seeing the effects of the war at various points. He talked about seeing the “house wher[e] Elsworth was shot” and “the town [H]amton was burnt and the boats that were[e] sunk.” The location where they were staying in Newport News was a former battlefield, and according to Gunderman, the soldiers had “a rebels grave for a pil[l]ow[.] [T]he ground is full of bul[l]ets and piece of shells.” These excerpts not only show how memorable the locations were to Gunderman, but also may serve as reasoning to him or to Brethren like Zug why it was important to remain nonviolent throughout the war. He seemed to pay much attention to the violent aspects of the war, and while this could be commonplace and may not directly indicate Gunderman’s religious beliefs, it is an interesting aspect that should not be ignored.

While the events that happened to the Sherfys—and most likely to Gunderman—represented some experiences of Brethren during the war, there is a different set of stories to be told for those who joined the Brethren church after the war’s end. Some men, such as George Zollers, decided to convert and become Brethren. While their motives for doing so were never explicitly stated, it is reasonable to assume that the violence that they witnessed was enough to make joining a peaceful religious group that preaches nonresistance an alluring advantage should another war happen in their lifetimes. Additionally, since many Brethren were granted conscientious objection status, it is possible that these men, and others who converted after the war, did so to ensure that they would not have to face combat again.

Zollers’ published autobiography *Thrilling Incidents on Sea and Land* (1892), described various aspects of his life, focusing on his career of whaling. In one section, he spoke of the

influence that the Bible had on him.<sup>60</sup> He credited his faith and the “purging influence” of religion for his strength, and emphasized the impact that other sects of religion had on him as well. However, after being content with “lonely and retired investigations of the Bible,” they eventually led him to joining the Brethren faith. Writing about his conversion, he explained, “after meeting with the brethren, and learning more of their simplicity, meekness and humility, and their wisdom in the Scriptures, and withal, their hospitality without grudging, I plead for admission into their number.” Zollers emphasized the aspects of combined peace and biblical importance to the Brethren, and it is possible that these elements were so appealing to him since he experienced such violence during the Civil War.

Between those who had experienced the brutalities of the war—either unintentionally or otherwise—Brethren persistence to pacifism and nonresistance remains. The Sherfy family’s commitment to orthodoxy highlights the arguments made by the Annual Meetings and authors such as Moomaw. Additionally, Gunderman’s letter to Zug, as well as Zollers’s conversion to the Brethren faith, allude to the brutalities of the Civil War, contrasting with the peaceful practices that stand central to the Brethren.

### **Conclusion:**

While not commonly discussed by scholars, Brethren involvement in the Civil War was a profound period for reflecting and developing Brethren teachings. Ultimately, the events and issues of the war brought two strong Brethren ideologies to a head. Both their commitment to nonresistance, and opposition to slavery, affected the actions of countless individuals. Those

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<sup>60</sup> George D. Zollers, “Thrilling Incidents on Sea and Land: The Prodigal’s Return,” The Brethren’s Publishing Company: 1892. Mount Morris, Illinois, 337. Quotes throughout this paragraph are also attributed to Zollers, page 337.

most notably impacted were those involved in Annual Meetings, those who owned slaves, and those who experienced the violence of the war first-hand.

There are many examples of Brethren encouraging and enforcing nonresistant practices. Between official minutes from Annual Meetings and publications from individuals such as Moomaw, it is clear that violence of any sort—even in defense of oneself—was not acceptable to the faith. At the same time, Annual Meeting minutes showed a consistent disapproval of purchasing, owning, or supporting slavery. Reports of men such as van Lawschet show how deep-rooted this objection was in Brethren history, regardless of scattered exceptions. Considering slavery was a substantial reason for the war, Annual Meeting minutes began to shift slightly. While it still held firm to their non-violent belief, it clearly supported the Northern cause, which aligned with their own stances on slavery as immoral. However, Brethren in both the North and the South aimed to keep out of war activity, but they refused to turn away either side, such as their persistence feed soldiers in need who came to them, regardless of if they were fighting for the Union or the Confederacy.<sup>61</sup>

A time of war offers a wonderfully rich opportunity for examining pacifist religions such as the Brethren. While this paper has only discussed a small regional sampling of Brethren men, more research can be done to broaden the scope of this field. An 1863 letter from B. F. Moomaw shows that several Annual Meetings were also held in the South during this time, not only at the previously discussed northern locations. Many southern Brethren did not want to cross dangerous battle lines to join their northern counterparts, and instead held their own Annual Meetings for some time.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, the Pennsylvania-Maryland region that was examined in

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<sup>61</sup> Sanger, *The Olive Branch*, 85.

<sup>62</sup> Roger Edwin Sappington, *The Brethren in the new nation: a source book on the development of the Church of the Brethren, 1785-1865*, Brethren Press: 1976, 217-218.

this paper is only a small section in the scholarship, and it is certain that other regions have their own stories to relate and reflections and alterations of Brethren beliefs.

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