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On July 7, 2014, Pope Francis invited six victims of clerical sexual abuse to the Vatican where he met with them individually to ask for forgiveness on behalf of the church. "Before God and his people," Francis stated in a homily following the meetings, "I express my sorrow for the sins . . . committed against you. And I humbly ask forgiveness. I beg your forgiveness, too, for the sins of omission on the part of church leaders who did not respond adequately to reports of abuse made by family members, as well as by abuse victims themselves."

Critics of the Catholic Church quickly dismissed the pope's actions as merely symbolic. Yet the public apology by the church's highest leader made it clear that the pattern of denying or minimizing the history of clerical sexual abuse could no longer be sustained. In his concluding words, Francis praised the courage of those who had dared to "shed light on a terrible darkness in the life of the Church."

Clearly, the Catholic Church has not been alone in its failures. In recent years, revelations of sexual abuse by well-known evangelical leaders have been widely reported—often following a familiar sequence of vigorous denial, disparaging claims about the victims, and strenuous efforts to preserve the reputation of the organization associated with the leader. And even though Mennonites would like to believe that their commitment to the gospel of peace has made them immune to sexualized violence, the painful truth is that abuse by church leaders is a reality in their tradition as well.

This issue of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* is devoted to the theme of sexual abuse—and the related motifs of discipline, healing, and forgiveness—within the Mennonite Church, with a particular focus on the controversy surrounding the actions of its most widely recognized theologian, John Howard Yoder (1927-1997).

We recognize the intense pain and controversy associated with this topic. Our decision to engage it in this public forum was not made casually. Clearly, many in the church are weary of the subject. Some are convinced that these issues have already been sufficiently addressed—an erring brother was restored to fellowship in the church and the time has come to put this topic to rest. Others have argued that the norms defining appropriate behavior have changed so significantly in recent decades that it is unfair to judge actions of the past by the standards of the present. Still others insist that we remain too close to the polarized context of the events to judge the facts fairly. And people on all sides of the conversation acknowledge with sadness the ongoing pain suffered by those most directly involved, along with friends and family members.

As editor of a journal committed to principles of balance and fairness, I am sympathetic with these concerns. Nonetheless, the arguments in favor of transparency are more compelling.

The first, and most important, reason for this special issue is the painful fact that sexual abuse is a reality among Mennonites, and that the church needs a forum to engage topics like discipline, accountability, and healing in a thoughtful way. Although the figure of John Howard Yoder looms large in the pages that follow, the primary goal of this issue has been to reflect critically on the broader themes surrounding that story. What, for example, has changed in the Mennonite Church since the 1970s, when concerns about sexual abuse were first raised in a public way? What have we learned since then about the trauma associated with sexualized violence? What pastoral insights for healing—both personal and collective—have we gleaned along the way? How do these experiences inform our understandings of forgiveness? And what are the larger blind spots in Anabaptist-Mennonite theology and practice that have made it difficult to exercise appropriate discipline with offenders? These are all questions that the church must continue to address on the basis of careful scholarship and reflection, as this issue seeks to do.

Second, this issue of *MQR* explicitly addresses the details of John Howard Yoder's thought and actions because of his undisputed prominence in twentieth-century Mennonite theology, ethics, ecclesiology, and culture. Though relations with his coreligionists could sometimes be tense, Yoder was without a doubt the most widely-recognized Mennonite of his generation. For decades, he served as the primary spokesman for peace church theology, bringing Anabaptist perspectives to bear in countless ecumenical and interfaith encounters. The authority he wielded was vested not in an office, but in the breadth of his learning, the depth of his convictions, the range of his linguistic and rhetorical skills, and the profound insights of his interdisciplinary publications. His writings shaped the theological trajectory of Christians around the world, far beyond the boundaries of the Mennonite Church. Moreover, until 1993, when he was quietly removed as a member of the *MQR* Board of Editors as part of a disciplinary process, Yoder had a close association with this journal. He was not only a frequent contributor to *MQR*, publishing nine articles and dozens of book reviews, but in 1997 we published a comprehensive bibliography of Yoder's writings and we have printed numerous essays engaging his thought, including a special issue (July 2003) devoted entirely to his work. Given Yoder's public prominence, and the considerable attention granted to his scholarship in this journal, it is appropriate for

reassessments of his life and work to also find expression in the pages of *MQR*.

Finally, for at least twenty years prior to his death in 1997, stories were circulating in the Mennonite church and beyond that vaguely associated Yoder with inappropriate behaviors. Yet few people were entirely clear about what, exactly, those behaviors entailed, whether or not they were consensual, and who had the authority to call him to account. Although scores of women reported that they had been the recipients of Yoder's unwelcomed attention, their concerns were often met with a frustrating silence or a sense that those in authority had failed to respond effectively. Along the way, numerous individuals, some seven different accountability groups, and a variety of church institutions generally agreed to maintain confidentiality regarding Yoder's actions. Those efforts to control information frequently fostered confusion, left victims feeling powerless, and created the impression that church institutions were more interested in preserving their reputations than redressing grievances. As a result of this shroud of secrecy, the wounds of the past have continued to fester.

The essay by historian **Rachel Waltner Goossen** that opens this issue marks a crucial step forward in shedding light on a story that has been kept in the shadows for far too long. Written at the invitation of a discernment group appointed by leaders of Mennonite Church USA and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Waltner Goossen's narrative provides a careful account of the complex issues that have swirled around Yoder and his legacy for the past three decades. The results of her study, based on numerous interviews and an exhaustive examination of the available archival and print sources, are sobering. Among other findings, Waltner Goossen's essay makes it clear that Yoder's persistent experimentation with new forms of Christian intimacy often had debilitating consequences—first and foremost for the many women who were affected by his overtures, but also for church leaders and institutions who invested enormous resources of time and energy in disciplinary processes that were largely ineffective. Repeatedly, Yoder rejected criticisms of his actions with the pernicious argument that the world—or uncomprehending skeptics in his own circles—will always misunderstand the revolutionary claims of the gospel. At the same time, Yoder was preoccupied with secrecy as he reached out to women; and he often made confidentiality an absolute precondition for his engagement with various accountability groups, frequently citing the principles of Matthew 18. Though one of the disciplinary processes did eventually conclude with Yoder's restoration to full fellowship in his home

congregation and to broader church ministry, a host of unresolved relationships clearly persisted until his death. Waltner Goossen's essay will not be the final word in this story. But it does provide a bracingly clear narrative and the essential sources necessary for an informed debate to go forward.

The essays that follow shift the focus from Yoder to a larger ecclesial context. Thus, **Carolyn Holderread Heggen** and **Rebecca Slough**, drawing on clinical, pastoral, and theological insights, offer specific guidance to pastors and congregations who are walking alongside survivors of sexual violence in their long journey toward recovery. **Linda Gehman Peachey** then traces the growing awareness in the Mennonite Church of the reality of sexual abuse and the efforts of Mennonite Central Committee and other church leaders to respond with congregational guidelines, print resources, news articles, and support networks for abuse victims. **Gayle Gerber Koontz** follows with a probing theological reflection on the gospel's "frustratingly extravagant call to forgive." And articles by **Jamie Pitts** and by coauthors **Paul Martens** and **David Cramer** explore the deeper theological tensions embedded in the Yoder legacy. These final essays, and the fact that we conclude the issue with an extended review by **John Rempel** of a recent book about Yoder, signal our intention to continue engaging Yoder's thought in the future.

This issue of *MQR* will not resolve the problem of sexual abuse in the Mennonite Church; nor will it lay to rest the issues surrounding John Howard Yoder and the church's response to his sexual politics. But it does mark a step in the direction of transparency, a renewed resolve to allow light to shine in places that have been dominated by darkness.

That transparency, however, dare not stop with a public account of Yoder's actions, or a confession by church leaders and institutions of their culpability in what transpired. Right remembering must also include an acknowledgement of a larger collective guilt—a public recognition of our failure as a church to question the authority granted to our public icons, making us blind to things we should have seen, and unable or unwilling to respond decisively on behalf of the vulnerable and the injured. The way forward would be easier, as the Russian novelist Alexander Solzhenitsyn has written, "if it were necessary only to separate [evil-doers] from the rest of us. . . . But the dividing line between good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being."

In the stark light of that truth, we can only respond in humility, resolving by God's grace to do better.

– John D. Roth, editor