



## Statement on Teaching and Scholarship Related to John Howard Yoder

John Howard Yoder (1927-1997) was Professor of Theology at Goshen Biblical Seminary and Mennonite Biblical Seminary from 1958 to 1961 and from 1965 to 1984. These two seminaries formed what is now Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary.

The origins of this statement are in a 2012 document that reported agreements intended to guide AMBS faculty teaching, criticism, interpretation, and use of John Howard Yoder's work. Since the composition of that document, research published by Ruth Krall and Rachel Waltner Goossen has shed considerable new light on Yoder's abusive actions and attempts by the seminary and other Mennonite institutions to stop him. Moreover, on March 22, 2015, AMBS held a private gathering in which survivors of Yoder's abuse were invited to share their stories with seminary faculty and staff, and then a public service in which seminary president Sara Wenger Shenk read a statement of confession and apology and the seminary board and faculty read statements of lament and commitment. The present statement accounts for the recent historical research, the seminary's reckoning with its past, and the public discussion that has ensued over the last several years.

AMBS laments the suffering caused by John Howard Yoder and is committed to listening to and learning from survivors of sexual abuse. We acknowledge that a patriarchal church and seminary culture, as well as reverence for Yoder's intellectual power and prominence, led seminary leadership to minimize survivors' claims. Although AMBS colleagues and administrators challenged Yoder after learning of his abusive behavior, this largely took the form of private intellectual debates, which extended over many years. Meanwhile, Yoder continued abusing women, including seminary students. After it became evident that AMBS disciplinary efforts were ineffective, Yoder was forced to resign quietly in 1984.

Yoder continued to teach, speak, and publish in Mennonite and ecumenical settings, even as investigations into his conduct were launched by his home congregation, Herald Press, and other Mennonite institutions. A growing survivors' network pressured church institutions, and finally Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference suspended Yoder's ministerial credentials and initiated a disciplinary process that lasted four years (1992–96). Although that process concluded with a public statement from the conference affirming Yoder's transformation and recommending his teaching ministry to the church, recent investigation suggests that Yoder was far from compliant and that institutional self-interest played a significant role in bringing the process to a close.

AMBS has a deep historical connection to Yoder's legacy, and seminary faculty face the complex challenge of coming to terms with that legacy as we keep our commitments to



listen to and learn from survivors and to discern carefully how Yoder's work should be interpreted in light of his abusive behavior.

**As faculty we agree that:**

- The relationship between Yoder's influential work on theology, ethics, and peace and his violent behavior are open for examination by faculty and students.
- Faculty will address forthrightly questions or issues raised as students consider the possible connections between his thought and some of his actions, and will examine what these writings communicate to vulnerable women, men, and children.
- AMBS will use particular care to name the context of Yoder's abusive actions when utilizing his writing on singleness, marriage, and sexuality and how to interpret it.
- Yoder's work has been and will continue to be read and evaluated within a broader context of scholars and practitioners, especially those who are addressing similar issues related to theology, ethics, and peace.
- Yoder will be presented as the complex person that he was — intellectually brilliant, creative, shy, deeply caring, and generous to some; dismissive of persons who confronted him about his misuse of power; and manipulative while committing violence against women.

**As a result of AMBS's experience with Yoder, we will continue to learn together and teach about:**

- The nature of power and authority and the issues that arise when they are used inappropriately and/or unwittingly;
- The necessity of recognizing and maintaining appropriate physical and psychological boundaries, especially with those of lesser power and authority or greater vulnerability (especially among students, colleagues, and people inside and outside of the church);
- Accountability for personal behavior at all times;
- The obligation to treat accusations or incidents of misconduct, especially sexual misconduct, seriously and with appropriate urgency and according to our grievance policy;
- The necessity of and strategies for protecting vulnerable women, men, children, and anyone living on the margins of our communities and congregations.

In conclusion, we acknowledge that, although John Howard Yoder's theological legacy has been widely influential, his abusive actions cause serious questions about this legacy. Though we are grateful that many, including some of our faculty members, testify to a rediscovery of Jesus through Yoder's work, we deeply regret the hurt he inflicted and commit to reexamining his theology in light of that damage. Moreover, we acknowledge the flaws of the accountability process and are committed to ongoing improvement of our policies and procedures to prioritize the needs of victims. Towards this, we invite accountability with



regard to these commitments through the AMBS grievance process; through anonymous course evaluations; and through conversation among AMBS constituents, administrators, and faculty. We are, in short, committed to ongoing healing, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation in God's beloved community.

AMBS Teaching Faculty  
October 1, 2018