

The Challenge of Biography: Reading Theologians in Light of their Breached Sexual Ethics

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Abstract

Though their biographies vastly differ, Karl Barth's long-term extra-marital relationship with Charlotte von Kirschbaum and John H. Yoder's sexual crimes have been the focus of a range of reactions and proposed approaches on how to read the theology of the two theologians given their biographies. This article will examine those critical responses using an analytical framework appropriated from Sameer Yadav's work on cognate conversations about locating and remedying the causes of white supremacy in the church: are the problems due to problematic theology, problematic institutional practice, or both? A correct diagnosis helps the theologian to then propose the right remedy. This adapted framework will be applied to the cases of Barth and Yoder to critically examine how Steven Plant and Rachel Muers respond to Barth's biography and how Stanley Hauerwas and Hilary Scarsella respond to Yoder's biography. After demonstrating how the different respondents address the issue as one primarily of problematic theology or problematic institutional practices, I will argue that it is both theology and practice that must be addressed in order to satisfactorily deal with the reality and scale of infection when it comes to influential theologians. Sample treatments will be offered for responding to Barth's and Yoder's biographies.

Keywords

Sexual ethics, Barth, Yoder, Muers, Scarsella, misconduct, von Kirschbaum

Introduction

Christian theological tradition is no stranger to our era's steady exposure of sexual misconduct by influential male leaders in society and the church.¹ Details of Karl Barth's

1. Ravi Zacharias and Bill Hybels are some recent examples of notoriety.

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long-standing affair with Charlotte von Kirschbaum have generated scrutiny and debate, prompting questions about how to read Barth's theology given such knowledge. On a different scale and type of offence, John Howard Yoder's multi-decade pattern of sexual abuse of women begs the question of whether Yoder should be read at all or put away for good. The recent revelations about Jean Vanier's sexual abuse of women at L'Arche provoke similar questions about how and if Vanier's theology is usable or damaged beyond salvageable repair.²

While Vanier's abuse has only recently become known, Yoder's crimes and most certainly Barth's arrangement have received much attention and critical engagement by male and female theologians alike. The biographical details of Barth and Yoder are vastly different; however, in both cases their behaviour with women is outside the traditional standard for Christian sexual ethics. Both men hold heavy influence in the modern theological tradition and have many theological heirs.³ Some would protest that it is problematic to compare the two in one article. However, the aim of this article is not to find a commonality between their misconduct. It is instead to survey the responses to the challenge posed by problematic biographies in theological inheritance—the reality that humans, with their moral failings and the systems built around their ideas, are an inevitable part of theology-making—and given that phenomenon, to propose answers to the critical question provoked by that breach in ethics: what do we do with a troubled inheritance? To avoid addressing that reality is to abstain from exercising ethical responsibility in theology-making. On the flip side, proposals that offer concrete interventions and yet fail to assess the problem comprehensively will not result in effective (and thus not responsible) theological interventions. The theologian is called to responsibly address theological inheritance, which includes inherited ideas, the systems that host those ideas, and the transmission of those ideas and systems in the practice of theology-making. This necessitates effective response to problematic biographies in order to avoid the illusion of disinheritance or selective inheritance—both of which fail to comprehensively deal with the reality of what is being received and transmitted.

This article seeks to address the question of how one should read Barth and Yoder given their sexual misconduct—including if they should be read at all. It is the author's creative response to the discussion generated from a theological ethics seminar on the theology of Barth and Yoder vis-à-vis their problematic biographies.⁴ I will describe a three-part analytical framework by Sameer Yadav who addresses the cognate problems of race by engaging Willie Jennings's work on supersessionism and

2. Ronan Sharkey, 'A Double Life: Jean Vanier', *The Tablet: The International Catholic Weekly* (7 November 2020), pp. 6–9. In this article, I will be focusing on just the first two figures.

3. Though the egalitarian-complementarian divide is a battleground for many debates, this is not the focus of this article. Instead, the problematic treatment of women by male theologians with significant influence in modern theological tradition will be examined.

4. I am grateful for those who offered valuable feedback during the drafting of this article: Brian Brock, Joshua Cockayne, Annie Dimond, Kevin Hargaden, Julie Land, Joanna Leidenhag, Christa McKirland, Scott Rice, Rahel Siebald, Jonathan Tran and Sameer Yadav. A segment of the paper was presented at Logia's 2021 Women and God Conference at St. Andrews.

race. I will appropriate Yadav's analytic to present my own three-part typology of diagnosis and remedy. Against the tendency to centre a response around a theologian's *value* (meaning, their enduring positive contribution or unimpeachable good), I will suggest that it is more effective to orient diagnosis and remedy around the scale and scope of *influence* their theologies have held. I will argue that a pragmatic approach that acknowledges the extent of influence (instead of questioning or defending value) is key for offering repair; such a diagnostic offers the possibility for effective intervention and highlighting of particularly pernicious points in their thought—of which any users who explicitly draw on them must be aware if they are to employ the use of these thinkers responsibly. The article will compare the responses to revelations about Barth's and Yoder's biographies by Steven Plant (for Barth) and Stanley Hauerwas (for Yoder) with the critical responses to those respective treatments by Rachel Muers and Hilary Scarsella, who both offer alternative proposals for engaging the troubled inheritance presented by the biographies. My three-part framework will be used to assess the merit and weaknesses of the proposals by Plant, Muers, Hauerwas and Scarsella. The article will conclude with examples of approaches that may provide more effective remedy to the challenge of sexual misconduct by influential theologians and the theological infection their stories illuminate.

Adapting Yadav's Typologies

Offences based on gender and race share a common need to confront abuses of power. Sameer Yadav explains Willie Jennings's compelling claim that white supremacy in Christian tradition traces its roots to supersessionism—the viewing of Gentile Christians as replacing Israel instead of joining as guests at Israel's table.⁵ The disease of whiteness and white supremacy which 'mangles' human intimacy is the 'medium through which an underlying Christian logic of supersessionism has managed to infect our societies'.⁶ Jennings's remedy is Jew-Gentile boundary-crossing towards intimate joining defined by 'mutual submission and the desire for shared belonging'.⁷ For Yadav, Jennings's claim is that racism and white supremacy is not exogenous to theology (a matter of applied ethics or practical reform) but endogenous to it, located in doctrine in the form of supersessionism.

Yadav explicitly states that his aim is not to defend Jennings's diagnosis and remedy, but instead to show how Jennings's 'doctrinal diagnosis and remedy remain insufficiently specific to be properly assessed for their correctness' and can hide and obscure other possible diagnoses and remedies.⁸ He differentiates between supersessionism as theological ground versus supersessionism as doxastic ground.⁹ Theological ground is the subjective

5. Sameer Yadav, 'Willie Jennings on the Supersessionist Pathology of Race: A Differential Diagnosis', in J.T. Turner and J.M. Arcadi (eds.), *The T&T Clark Companion to Analytic Theology* (Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2021), p. 362.

6. Yadav, 'Jennings on Supersessionist Pathology', p. 362.

7. Yadav, 'Jennings on Supersessionist Pathology', p. 362.

8. Yadav, 'Jennings on Supersessionist Pathology', p. 359.

9. Yadav, 'Jennings on Supersessionist Pathology', p. 363.

attitudes and beliefs of individuals, while doxastic practice involves social arrangements whose structures and practices support explicitly held beliefs as well as *aliefs*—implicit attitudes which are similar to beliefs, but automatic and at times in conflict or tension with explicitly held beliefs.¹⁰ Unconscious bias is a type of alief that comes into play when an individual states that she is not racist but prefers white or European persons, standards and values—and judges all others against such a metric. A school can supposedly welcome Black students and yet forbid black hair worn in afros, braids or any other form labelled ‘unacceptable’.¹¹ A church can claim to be inclusive of persons with disability while failing to examine and correct the ableist assumptions and barriers in its programming and sermons. These examples demonstrate how explicitly articulated claims (diversity) and unconsciously embraced aliefs can conflict with each other.

Yadav’s argument is interesting because of his basic premise: the right remedy depends on a correct diagnosis. If a remedy does not target the reality of the infection’s manifestation, then the proposed solution is ineffective in fighting the infection. It is not enough to merely say, ‘supersessionism is the infection which leads to racism and white supremacy’, because it does not take into account how and where supersessionism has infected Christian communities and institutions. Yadav names three possible ways the infection manifests: (1) through the subject attitudes (beliefs and aliefs) of individuals; (2) through the social arrangements (structures and practices) of communities, regardless of the beliefs held by individuals; or (3) in something more inherent, like the replication of theological DNA in a system—where problematic DNA must be isolated and targeted if the causes instead of the symptoms are to be addressed.¹²

In presenting these possible options, Yadav is challenging the reader to consider how the infection of supersessionism (and resultant racism and white supremacy) is *endogenous* to a system. An accurate diagnosis allows for an effective remedy that targets (1) problematic individual beliefs in authority, (2) problematic social arrangements and their doxastic structures and practices, or (3) something more embedded in the fabric and DNA of theology.

10. Yadav, ‘Jennings on Supersessionist Pathology’, p. 363.

11. Emma Dabiri writes, ‘More recently with the advent of the natural hair movement[,] people of African descent have been rejecting the standard that insists we must straighten our hair to fit in, undoing centuries of thinking that stigmatises our hair. Shamefully, the reaction from many UK schools has been to punish and denigrate children’. See Emma Dabiri, ‘Black pupils are being wrongly excluded over their hair. I’m trying to end this discrimination’, *The Guardian*, 25 February 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/feb/25/black-pupils-excluded-hair-discrimination-equality-act>. For commentary on similar issues in the US, see Leah Asmelash, ‘Black students say they are being penalized for their hair, and experts say every student is worse off because of it’, *CNN*, 8 March 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/08/us/black-hair-discrimination-schools-trnd/index.html>.

12. Yadav writes that supersessionism ‘is doxastic ground insofar as it names a set of belief-forming practices relative to Christian thinking about God’s relation to human peoples, as well as the outputs of those practices’. Yadav, ‘Jennings on Supersessionist Pathology’, p. 363.

The aim of this article is not to defend Jennings's analysis. Nor is it to defend Yadav's method as unimpeachable. What Yadav's method offers is the following: (1) he acknowledges without debate that there is a problem, (2) he is interested in an accurate diagnosis about the location of the problem, so that (3) he can offer an effective remedy that addresses the actual problem and offers concrete correction to what is actually happening—and not just what one assumes is transpiring. This proposal explores the possibility of adapting Yadav's analytical framework to better address the challenge of problematic sexual misconduct by male theologians in the academy.

As Yadav notes, very few theologians would argue that American Christianity does not have a race problem that leads to inequitable favouring of whites over non-whites.¹³ The problem of sexual misconduct by prominent theologians raises a similar dilemma: why does this keep happening in the system of theology-making? It appears that there is an infection—but where is it located, and how is it transmitted? In the theology of the theologian in question? In how theological institutions are arranged and theology-making practised? Or is it embedded more deeply, in a kind of theological genetic code which is passed on from one generation to the next?

To offer possible effective diagnoses and prognoses, I propose here typologies modelled after Yadav's possible diagnoses for supersessionism but appropriated towards the issue of sexual misconduct by influential theologians.¹⁴ This taxonomy will help the reader recognize and categorize the proposals being offered in response to Barth and Yoder's biographies. In a Type I infection, the theology which contains attitudes of the problematic theologian is the issue, and thus his theology must be corrected to stem the infection. In a Type II infection, the theology-making practices of theological institutions are the primary cause of the infection, and thus the remedy must correct such institutional practices.

As for a Type III infection, my proposal for such a diagnosis will differ slightly from Yadav's. Scientists have shown how environmental stressors impact DNA replication and mutation. The field of epigenetics investigates environmentally-triggered heritable changes in gene expression which occur without changing the DNA sequence.¹⁵ Thus, targeting a genetic 'infection' does not merely involve gene therapy of the specific genetic material, but also explores environmental factors which may affect the DNA expression. If one were to translate this to a Type III infection in our scenario, such an intervention requires a comprehensive approach which targets both the beliefs embedded in theology (DNA) as well as the theology-making practices (environment) which may lead to sexual misconduct by theologians of influence.

I have now described a three-part typology for interpreting the proposals of theologians who offer responses to the theologies of Barth and Yoder vis-à-vis their

13. Yadav, 'Jennings on Supersessionist Pathology', p. 357.

14. While they follow the spirit of Yadav's emphasis (possible diagnoses and corresponding remedies), the three-part typologies I am about to describe are of my own making. Thus, any errors in my taxonomy should be attributed to me and not to Yadav.

15. V. Bollati and A. Baccarelli, 'Environmental Epigenetics', *Hereditas* 105 (2010), pp. 105–112.

biographies. However, before assessing those proposals, I will attempt to explain why such typologies may be useful in surveying responses.

Navigating Value versus Influence with Yadav's Typologies

When it comes to responding to the sexual misconduct of influential theologians like Barth and Yoder, a range of reactions emerge about how to view their theological work. Some will stress what it means to do good by Barth or Yoder in light of their otherwise positive contributions. Others will raise questions of how to do justice to the victims and how to hold perpetrators accountable. Given what is at stake, the debate that is often generated by knowledge of a theologian's sexual misconduct is this: should the theologian be read any longer? Given what we know, should we still read Barth? Should we still read Yoder?

Underneath such a question of 'should we read a theologian' lie two assumptions: (1) why we think certain theologians should be read and (2) what we think we are doing by reading them. Usually, the argument of whether or not to read certain theologians is about their *value*: they are read because their work is valuable (meaning, offering a uniquely positive and bettering contribution in theology), and the act of reading them acknowledges such value. If such a set of assumptions is the stated argument for continuing to read a theologian with a problematic biography, then the theological reader who accepts the premise perpetuates a valuing of the perpetrator over the victim. The reader thereby enacts an unjust theological practice that perpetuates the very problems that lead to theological systems where sexual misconduct can occur unchecked. We should note here that this response does little to address the concern of possible infection in theology.

On the flip side, if one argues that the theologian should not be read anymore, the matrix of assumptions beneath such a proposal includes not only questions about the theologian's tarnished legacy but also suspicion about if and how their theo-ethical presuppositions and attitudes supported their misconduct. The assumption is that the content is in some sense infected, problematically diseased, and thus unusable for theology-making. By that reasoning, no longer reading a theologian prevents the spread of theological infection.

Thus, the question 'should we read XYZ theologian?' is about the *value* of the theologian's work vis-à-vis their moral failure. Those who advocate for continued reading often insist that XYZ theologian is too valuable to ignore. This generates a counter-response against such a claim; the theologian is no longer valuable because everything they have taught is now suspect given their breach in ethics.

Questions of value are often concerned with past and present merit. They are different from conversations about *impact*—the level of influence a theologian has had in creating the theological belief systems and practices of today involves more than whether an individual chooses to regard that theologian as valuable or not. Value is assessed based on positive worth, whereas impact and influence are not inherently positive: Hitler, colonization, and Harvey Weinstein have immensely impacted people, cultures and societies, but that impact or influence cannot be said to be positive. If we were concerned with individuals with low or localized influence in theological systems, one could perhaps be

satisfied with the removal of their work from a bookshelf or a syllabus. However, such a response does not deal with the reality that an influential theologian's ideas—including their subject attitudes—exist in the fabric of theology and in the systems which tutor their theological heirs. No longer reading 'infected' theology only works if the infection is exogenous to the individuals making that choice to read or not to read. If they are already influenced by the ideas which include the subject attitudes of that theologian—directly or indirectly—the reality is that they are likely already infected. In such a scenario, one is not dealing with a localized outbreak, but a transnational or global pandemic. Not reading the theologian any longer does not address the reality of existing infection on a pandemic scale.

Yadav speaks of aliefs—unconscious beliefs held by individuals and which can even unconsciously counter explicitly held beliefs. When a theologian has the level of influence of Barth or Yoder, their thoughts and attitudes have been a part of the formation and practice of theology to a point that many modern theologians will hold both beliefs and aliefs built upon attitudes and ideas in those very theologies—whether it is recognized or not. Thus, if a widespread infection is to be addressed, the response must be oriented around the *level of impact or influence* held by the theologian—instead of about their continued or discontinued value. Only intervention measures which adequately deal with pandemic-scale infections will yield effective amelioration and remedy. Also, those affected will need to be convinced that there is an infection both widespread and pernicious enough to be open to remedial medicine.¹⁶

Instead of asking the question of whether a theologian's work is still of value given his breach in sexual ethics, my adaptation of Yadav's typologies offers a different analytic: how can one respond to an influential theologian's problematic biography in a way that helps correct and remedy harmful attitudes and ideas in theology and practice? Instead of the question 'should we read Barth or Yoder?', the challenge turns into one of appropriate response: 'how should we read Barth or Yoder, given the scale of their influence and given their misconduct?' This includes the possibility of no longer reading the theologians, but it goes beyond such options.

If we draw upon the analogy of infection, my point is that the right question is not 'are we infected?' nor 'how do we prevent a widespread infection?' My argument is that we are all infected because theological code makes up how we do theology—and thus the diagnosis and remedy must address both theology and practice. The infection is not exogenous to us; it is endogenous by virtue of the ones who have taught us after being influenced by Barth and Yoder. The question is, 'we're all somehow infected—so how do we remedy it?' Ignoring the possibility of infection is irresponsible; it is similar to someone who knows a degenerative disease runs in the family but avoids medical check-ups until the symptoms have become impossible to ignore. On the other hand, an infection does not mean the entire body is infected; it may be a toe or an entire lymphatic system that is impacted, and a responsible remedy must respond to the reality of infection. Instead of assuming that an infection has diseased an entire

16. As the COVID-19 global pandemic has revealed, the existence of a vaccine does not necessarily mean that all persons are open to receiving such medicine.

writer's corpus, one must examine the infection to understand how affected arguments are engaged in the theologian's writing. Comprehensive repair is needed and serves as the best safeguard against unmitigated damage and unchecked proliferation. To continue the medical analogy, while screening for certain early signs of cancer does not guarantee prevention against all types of cancer (i.e., screening for breast cancer does not screen for lung cancer), such early intervention helps mitigate the risk of more developed forms.

Prominent theologians have had a wide impact on theology; therefore, a proper response that is aimed towards remedy and mitigation against further infection must effectively engage that level of influence. I suggest that a Type III intervention that addresses both theology and institutional practice is the only one that sufficiently addresses the kind of impact an influential theologian has had.

With the three typologies in mind (Type I focusing on theology as the carrier of infection, Type II on institutional practices as the carrier of infection, and Type III on both theology and practices as the carriers of infection) we now turn to the critical engagement of scholars who respond to revelations about the problematic biographies of male theologians. I will examine whether the respondent has offered a proposal that sufficiently addresses the repair to practice and theology (beliefs and aliefs) that will be required when dealing with a theologian with the level of influence held by Barth and Yoder.

Literature on Karl Barth and von Kirschbaum; Plant's and Muers's Responses

Much literature has been dedicated to Karl Barth's relationship with his live-in secretary and life companion Charlotte von Kirschbaum, whom Barth describes as his help-meet in his dedication of *Church Dogmatics III*. Karl Barth lived with both Charlotte and his wife Nelly in the same house from 1929 until von Kirschbaum's dementia required her placement in special care facilities (in 1965). In 1987, Renate Köbler published *In the Shadow of Karl Barth* to bring out of the shadows the work and biography of von Kirschbaum. The charge in her introduction and the epilogue curated by Hans Provingheuer is directed towards the Barthians who chose to bury von Kirschbaum in obscurity in order to better hold up their male paragon in the light.¹⁷

In 1998, Suzanne Selinger wrote *Charlotte von Kirschbaum and Karl Barth* with the aim of not only honouring von Kirschbaum's labour towards Barth's work but also highlighting Barth's and von Kirschbaum's mutual influence on each other's theologies, especially in the realm of gender—and by doing so, hailing von Kirschbaum in her own right as a theologian.¹⁸ Both Köbler and Selinger present von Kirschbaum as a tireless, perhaps over-worked person, but are hesitant to pronounce Barth's dependence on von

17. Renate Köbler, *In the Shadow of Karl Barth*, trans. Keith Crim (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014 [WJK, 1989]).

18. Suzanne Selinger, *Charlotte von Kirschbaum and Karl Barth: A Study in Biography and the History of Theology* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).

Kirschbaum as abuse.¹⁹ It is clear that a fierce mutual love was shared between the two. It is also clear that Karl Barth could not have been the theological juggernaut he became without the insight, labour and influence of von Kirschbaum.²⁰

In 2008, the Barth estate decided to release letters between von Kirschbaum and Karl Barth in the hopes of ‘putting vicious rumors to rest’.²¹ In 2017, Christiane Tietz presented her paper on those letters to the Karl Barth Society of North America, causing a multiplicative firestorm of response that included indignant outrage towards Barth as well as defence of his work despite the biography.²² Thirty years had passed since Köbler’s published work on von Kirschbaum’s biography, which matched the content of the letters.

In 2019, Steven Plant wrote ‘When Karl met Lollo’ with the stated hopes of bringing in the voice of Nelly Barth, Karl Barth’s wife, and also exploring the consequences of Barth’s decision and biography for how we read his theology, particularly in *Church Dogmatics III/4*, where Barth explores the theological significance of man and woman. Plant’s essay foregrounds the fact that Nelly Barth protested the relationship, to the point where at different times both Karl and Nelly contemplated divorce. This was never concurrently agreed upon.²³ Yet the arrangement bore great cost to Nelly’s person, mental health and well-being.

In 2020, Rachel Muers wrote a response to Plant called ‘The personal is the (academic) political: Why care about the love lives of theologians?’ She outlines how Plant’s entrenched male gaze fails to consistently showcase Nelly’s ‘voice’ and instead presents Nelly through Karl’s opinion and Karl’s gaze. Muers states that her intent is ‘not to level any accusations against Barth—there would be no evidential foundation for them’.²⁴ She cautions against jumping from Barth’s biography to his theology (like his teaching on marriage and sexuality, or on the broader subject of his trustworthiness). Instead, she calls the reader to focus on the political—meaning the politics of sex and gender that are at play in Plant’s retelling of the story. More importantly, the theologian should examine how theology is done through the ‘systemic violence of sexism, misogyny, sexual abuse and abuses of power, including ... the ways academic and ecclesial

19. If von Kirschbaum was exploited, it seems to be by the academic theological tradition and by the very Barthians who find von Kirschbaum inconvenient and expendable.

20. One could argue the same for Nelly Barth, his wife.

21. The letters do not hide the love shared between Karl Barth and von Kirschbaum; nor do they show that the strange living and romantic arrangement was hidden. It was well known to the public.

22. Christiane Tietz, ‘Karl Barth and Charlotte von Kirschbaum’, *Theology Today* 74.2 (2017), pp. 86–111. Christiane Tietz’s recent biography of Karl Barth does not shy away from these biographical details. See Christiane Tietz, *Karl Barth: A Life in Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

23. Steven Plant, ‘When Karl Met Lollo: The Origins and Consequences of Karl Barth’s Relationship with Charlotte von Kirschbaum’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 72.2 (2019), p. 135.

24. Rachel Muers, ‘The Personal is the (Academic) Political: Why Care about the Love Lives of Theologians?’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 73.3 (2020), p. 200.

structures and practices may facilitate these problems'.²⁵ Theology should be done differently than pointing back to a single individual (male) author of a system. To prevent similar problems, theologians should focus their energies on 'the complex, conflicted and multiply failing ecclesial and academic communities within which theology was and is done' and the labour and assumptions that sustain them.²⁶

Analysing Plant's and Muers's Responses

Here we will compare Plant and Muers's responses to Karl Barth's biography by using our modified version of Yadav's typologies. Plant's constructive response to the problem of Barth's long-standing relationship seems to offer a Type I treatment: examine particular points in the theology that might have direct linkages to Barth's poly-amorous relating. Muers, in response, says that one should not get so fixated on the biography or the theology—and that the problem of Barth's biography should make us reconsider the system that produced and enabled his behaviour. She is proposing a Type II diagnosis: the practices of the theological academy are the problem, and the solution must address those behaviours.

Notably, neither Muers nor Plant address the situation as a Type III scenario, which I have argued is the only treatment that sufficiently addresses the possible scale of infection in the case of an influential theologian. It is not clear why Muers thinks the theological implications should be ignored for the sake of addressing what she calls the 'political', which in her description seems to be about addressing the doxastic practices that foster systemic violence or sexism. For example, in light of the published letters, Susanne Hennecke wrote extensively on possible permutations of influence between theology and biography, which is essentially a Type I treatment.²⁷ Muers's call to address problematic practices can too easily appear to come at the expense of examining problematic aspects in theology. If one were to defend her Type II treatment, the task would be to show that she does not need to address theology in order to critically engage and remedy practices. However, Barth's influence as a doctor of the church makes it unlikely that a Type II approach alone will suffice, as Barth's theology serves as the foundation for many beliefs and aliefs. Viewing the challenge posed by Barth's relationship with von Kirschbaum as a Type III infection would allow for both Muers's and Plant's (and Hennecke's) explorations of the problem and the possible remedies—while hopefully avoiding the male-gaze perpetuation of Plant's attempt and also the avoidance of

25. Muers directly quotes Guth here. Karen Guth, 'Doing Justice to the Complex Legacy of John Howard Yoder: Restorative Justice Resources in Witness and Feminist Ethics', *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 35.2 (2015), p. 125.

26. Muers, 'The Personal is the Political', p. 202. Muers argues that it should be possible to have a critical conversation about the formation of academic and ecclesial communities, 'using these stories about the historical contexts of theology to help us to recognize situations and concerns in which contemporary theology is implicated'.

27. Susanne Hennecke, 'In the Connectedness of Theological Statements with Life on the Basis of the Correspondence between Karl Barth and Charlotte von Kirschbaum (1925–1935)', *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 77.4-5 (2016), pp. 324–36.

theological implications by Muers. The issue is not that one of these treatments is wrong, but that one without the other is incomplete.

Literature on Yoder and Hauerwas and Scarsella's Responses

Consider here the trail of literature on Yoder's systematic, predatory abuse of women (often theology students) in the pursuit of his 'Grand Noble Experiment' in sexuality and theology. In 2015, historian Rachel Goossen published a report on the types and scale of Yoder's sexual abuse as well as a summary of the attempts by various institutions such as his Mennonite church and the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary at bringing about discipline and accountability for his actions—which proved to be long and unsuccessful. At a minimum, fifty women were involved in his sexual experiment whom he baptized as a theological experiment, and the numbers are even higher if one were to consider the complaints lodged against Yoder overseas.

In Stanley Hauerwas's 2017 response to the revelations about Yoder's problematic behaviour, Hauerwas condemns Yoder's actions and also names his own lack of clarity about what to say, given the heinousness of the abuses and also given Hauerwas's friendship with Yoder's family.²⁸ He confesses that he did not know the extent of the problem until 1992 and had too positive a picture of the disciplinary process. Hauerwas tries to name where he feels he differs from Yoder, to whom he owes much of his own theology: Yoder assumed communal belonging alone would shape a person's desires, whereas Hauerwas argues that intentional training and discipleship are needed to shape a moral imagination. Belonging alone does not change a person. Alongside such reasoning, Hauerwas suggests that a person read Yoder, not to find out what is wrong, but instead to look for what is missing from Yoder's work.²⁹ Hauerwas claims that Yoder became entangled in what he did not address and that Yoder's insights into Scripture are still valuable and even constructive for various feminist and trauma theologians.³⁰

Hilary Scarsella, a Mennonite, wrote a powerful response to Hauerwas. First, she names that Hauerwas's stated desire to not further distress Yoder's family (who are secondary victims of Yoder's behaviour) ends up placing the responsibility for the suffering of the perpetrator's family on the survivors of Yoder's abuse, instead of where it should be—on Yoder.³¹ Then, when Hauerwas states that he 'owes it to Yoder' to write about the

28. Stanley Hauerwas, 'In Defense of "Our Respectable Culture": Trying to Make Sense of John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse', *ABC Religion & Ethics* (18 October 2017), <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/in-defence-of-our-respectable-culture-trying-to-make-sense-of-jo/10095302>.

29. Hauerwas, 'In Defense'.

30. Hauerwas, 'In Defense'.

31. Hilary Scarsella, 'Not Making Sense: Why Stanley Hauerwas's Response to Yoder's Sexual Abuse Misses the Mark', *ABC Religion & Ethics* (30 November 2017), <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/not-making-sense-why-stanley-hauerwas-response-to-yoders-sexual/10095168>. She writes, 'This tactic of deploying real or feigned concern for a perpetrator's family against those sexually harmed by that person is not unique to Yoder's case. In my work I see it used repeatedly in communities of all kinds to manipulate survivors of sexual violence into silence

still-valuable aspects of Yoder's teaching, he ends up prioritizing what is owed to the perpetrator, and not the long-suffering victims.³² She demonstrates further how Hauerwas in his own biography failed to pay attention to the complaints of graduate students who raised concerns about Yoder (thus, Hauerwas goes against his logic that 'one woman would have been too many').³³ Scarsella then details how Hauerwas tries to make sense of Yoder's abuses, which she claims is 'an attempt to preserve one's need to see Yoder as good enough to occupy a place of continued ethical, spiritual, or theological authority'.³⁴ Citing Hauerwas's stated aversion to engaging feminist thought, Scarsella remarks that Hauerwas would have been able to see and avoid the problematic promoting of logic that sustains sexual violence if he had leaned on their insight. In Scarsella's view, Hauerwas argues for the continued indispensability of Yoder's work because Hauerwas's own thought-world is at risk if Yoder's thought is put away. This will only perpetuate a sexually violent system.

Instead, Scarsella proposes that 'rather than investing our intellectual and spiritual energy in the goal of fixing a system of thought that has produced such harm, we would be wise instead to set our intention on cultivating theological space committed to thinking with and through the experiences of sexual violence survivors and the logics that empower survival and well-being in the face of sexual threat'.³⁵ In short, Scarsella proposes that the biography indicts the theology, rendering it unusable—and that the practice of new theology-making is the necessary solution.

Analysing Hauerwas's and Scarsella's Response

I will again use my modified version of Yadav's typologies to examine Hauerwas and Scarsella's responses to Yoder's biography.

Hauerwas attempts to approach the problem as a Type I infection: the theology is the issue. His proposal focuses on reading Yoder critically in light of the latter's biography and correcting the theology. Contra Plant, who seems to assume the widespread influence of Barth, Hauerwas argues explicitly for the value that remains in Yoder's theology.

Scarsella's critique of Hauerwas demonstrates that a Type I treatment does little to address how to mitigate such abuses from happening in the future. The infection remains insufficiently treated. This diagnosis fails to address the institutional realities of theology-making that are part of the problem. Scarsella criticizes and rejects Hauerwas's Type I treatment and notably points to there being little in Yoder's work that confronts current battles with white supremacy, sexual violence and abuse. She proposes instead the creating of new space to practise theology around the logic and experiences of survivors and their well-being in the face of sexual threat. Her proposal is

and justify the decision not to address institutional or community dynamics that enable harm'.

32. Scarsella, 'Not Making Sense'.

33. Scarsella, 'Not Making Sense'.

34. Scarsella, 'Not Making Sense'.

35. Scarsella, 'Not Making Sense'.

something in between a Type II and Type III treatment: she focuses on practices and the creation of new theology, but it is unclear how such a remedy addresses the existing use of attitudes in Yoder's theology beyond that new space. Put it another way, how does this new system not only help create new practices, but also correct existing infections?

I suggest that—like Hauerwas—Scarsella also employs reasoning which is about *value*. Thus, Scarsella sees Yoder's theology as no longer of value, and it is the theology generated from survivors that is of value. If the infection is localized to what is written in Yoder's books alone, then Scarsella's proposal is sufficient. The solution is to stop reading him. However, ideas are not only transmitted through reading and writing; they are transmitted through teaching, practices and the impressing of beliefs and aliefs in theology. Yoder's influence is widespread, and there is no reason to believe that infection from Yoder's thought-world would not be present in spaces oriented around the logic and experiences of survivors.³⁶ One would need to prove that survivors of sexual violence do not carry diseased thought and practices.³⁷ Such gathering of survivors, meant to provide healthier theology, still requires intervention to stem the spread of infections which one might not even be aware of—aliiefs that operate at unconscious and even contradictory levels.

My second concern with Scarsella's proposal is that though she does propose new practices, it is unclear how those practices effectively challenge the beliefs and aliefs inherited from Yoder's thought-world. To put it plainly, how do those practices, if they help to create an effective antidote, disseminate their remedy to infected spaces? It is one thing to invite survivors and allies into such a new space; it is quite another for the lessons from that space to effectively bring about change in existing operating spaces. Without a confrontation of the aliefs and beliefs of practices and the repair of problematic aliefs and beliefs, a new space could easily stay on the periphery, with limited impact on spaces and thought-worlds of influence. It would be like finding a vaccine or effective retroviral medicine but not disseminating it widely enough to mitigate the spread of the infection. Without an explanation of how her proposed practices help to confront and change the larger way theology is done, Scarsella's proposal is limited in impact and change. Thus, the infection remains at large.

I have suggested here that Hauerwas's Type I approach is inadequate but also that Scarsella's proposal falls short of a successful Type III remedy. I suggest that neither proposal sufficiently addresses the scale of possible infection in the case of beliefs and

36. Villegas puts it well: 'Yoder's influence has already been internalized in a whole system of thought. Repression allows a legacy to continue in secret. Yoderian habits inform a field of scholarship—arguments, methods, styles of theological ethics—even when he is not cited'. See Isaac Samuel Villegas, 'The Ecclesial Ethics of John Howard Yoder's Abuse', *Modern Theology* (11 May 2020), p. 193.

37. As an example, even if a Black person has removed themselves from a racially hostile and anti-Black environment, internalized racism may manifest in that individual's own anti-Blackness and self-hatred. An Asian person who has likewise removed herself from an anti-Asian space may find in herself lingering tendencies and desire to conform to white or Western standards at the cost of self-rejection and erasure of her ethnicity.

practices downstream of an influential theologian. Neither recommends an effective Type III treatment.

Revisiting Value versus Influence: Moving Towards an Effective Remedy

After assessing the treatments by Plant, Muers, Hauerwas and Scarsella, I have suggested that none of the four have offered an intervention that successfully addresses the widespread level of infection represented by the level of influence held by theologians like Barth and Yoder.

I revisit here the question of value versus influence. My typologies (Types I, II and III) offer a way of navigating through the tensions of problematic theological inheritance because the typologies are not framed around the ‘value’ of the theologian; they are instead about identifying the location of infection that yields problematic theology, including theology with wide influence.

I suggest that the diagnosis of a Type III infection is the only one that acknowledges the impact of a theologian of wide influence. Correcting problematic points in theology alone (Type I) will not automatically change practices; correcting problematic practices alone (Type II) does not automatically lead to addressing problematic theology. A Type III prognosis prescribes the examination of problematic elements in theology and concentrated effort towards changing practices in order to change the way the community, and in this case the theological academy, operates. Thus, the argument is not that Yoder’s theology is too ‘valuable’ to put away. The argument is that Yoder has made such a significant impact on our theological world that we need to understand how the theology works (aliefs, beliefs and attitudes) to show what needs to change. Recognizing Yoder’s impact in theological tradition is not a value statement on the unimpeachable good of Yoder’s theology; it is a statement of practical recognition that one cannot address the questions of ecclesiology and ethics for the church without wading through waters of troubled inheritance.

Consider the seemingly sterile analogy of computer programming to illustrate systemic change and repair. Computer software consists of codes written by human programmers and relies on a series of binary instructions around either the number zero or the number one. A computer program is efficient by virtue of the human person who constructed the efficient code. Computers are not inherently unbiased because they are machines—they are inherently biased because they are written by people, and people write in their biases.³⁸ Quantum computing, which is touted as the future of technology, increases the speed of calculation but it does little to challenge the problems inherent to

38. This is one of the (many) great conundrums with considering the future of technology and artificial intelligence—in whose image are these programs and robots being made? Certainly, they obscure differences and exclude the marginalized—just like the un-searching eye of the one who wrote the code. As an example, consider the seemingly innocuous camera, which seems to aim an unbiased eye in capturing what is in its lens. Historically, polaroid filters privileged lighter skin tones over darker ones. See Sarah Lewis, ‘The

the commands that might be flawed. An apt example is the 1996 Ariane 5 rocket launch, which failed due to software errors that were remnants from the program for its predecessor, the Ariane 4. Software engineers failed to account for systemic realities and assumed problematic constraints when writing their new code, which led to the burning up of \$370 million in equipment and research.³⁹ I offer another illustrative scenario: just as Y2K was anticipated to cause an apocalyptic digital meltdown, 1 January 2038 is anticipated to potentially cause computer crashes due to similar concerns. On that date, the number of seconds since 1 January 1970 will exceed one of the maximum values of many currently operating computers. William Porquet, the man who raised the alarm about 2038, is concerned about old software ‘that nobody tends to anymore—on long-established networks, or on old hardware being used in remote parts of the world’.⁴⁰

The point is, even if thought to be of an old system (or an old rocket), code from the past affects the code of our present and future—and must be addressed with a careful and rigorous tending to that reality. Established code affects our operations and assumptions in ways of which the user is often unaware. These examples illustrate the reality of writing new code into a system of existing codes. No matter what a computer programmer writes, the reality is that she writes within a universe of existing codes and commands, zeros and ones. There are patterns, norms and behaviours that she needs to understand in order to connect with that universe, to better it, and to challenge what makes that world problematic.

What this analogy offers is not an estimation of each theologian based on his value against his misconduct; it instead recognizes that the theological code written by Barth, Yoder and others runs through much of our systems and assumptions. Theologians respond to theologians of the past—their good and their ugly—in order to teach those who teach the Church how to be faithful. A theologian can try and put Yoder’s written thoughts away, but Yoder’s actual thought-world has constructed communities, churches, institutions and systems. In order to know what to do with them, to know if their theology served as the ground for abuse or exploitation, and to discern how to change theological belief and institutional practice, theologians must know how such code works—not only to understand them but to understand ourselves and to write a new code, a new liturgy or way to do theology as an act of worship, for the future. To correct the problematics therein requires knowing the code and logic on which those systems run so that the theologian can propose the changes and modifications needed for those spaces of worship and doxastic practice to function at greater health, guarding against oppression and violence, and with deepened faithfulness to scripture and the Triune God. The conundrum is that problematic biographies of theologians like Yoder and Barth make that task more difficult and painful because their stories have brought trauma or remind us of trauma in the life of the Church. Repair is needed.

Racial Bias Built into Photography’, *New York Times* (25 April 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/25/lens/sarah-lewis-racial-bias-photography.html>.

39. Chris Baraniuk, ‘The Number Glitch That Can Lead to Catastrophe’, *BBC Future* (5 May 2015), <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20150505-the-numbers-that-lead-to-disaster>.

40. Baraniuk, ‘The Number Glitch’.

If the theologian discovers along the way, that there is good still in this complex theological inheritance, then that is a merciful gift. But the merciful gift is not the reason one should decide to still read. Church and theological authorities live in service of the Church. In order to call the Church to be more faithful than it was yesterday, the theologian must be informed of the logic and reasoning that led to the problems and values of today.⁴¹

A Proposal Around a Type III Diagnosis and Remedy in Reading Barth

I will now offer a Type III treatment for Barth when it comes to theology and institutional practice; the subsequent section will pursue the same for Yoder. The aim of these sections is not to claim that these are the only possible Type III treatments in the case of each theologian; it is instead to demonstrate the possibility of a comprehensive Type III approach. I will incorporate elements of Plant's Type I proposal (which addresses problematic points in Barth's theology) with elements of Muers's Type II treatment (which deals with diseased practices in theology-making). In both cases, I will begin by addressing the problems in institutional practice first before addressing problems in theology.

Type III, Part I: Addressing Diseased Practice in How Barth is Taught

Muers offers a Type II solution. In order to stop the problematic practice of orienting theology around a singular (male) exemplar of theological practice, Muers suggests focusing instead on the contexts in which theology is done: the treatment of men as individual 'heroic inventors', innovators, and guarantors of orthodoxy; the assumption that the household of the male academic revolves around his work; and the male-centred point of view that 'reinforce[s] the gendered structure of theological authority'.⁴²

Here we must take care to clearly name the exploitation of von Kirschbaum which this article is seeking to address. Muers notes after speaking about the phenomenon of the #MeToo movement that there would be no evidential foundation for such accusations against Barth.⁴³ The exploitation of von Kirschbaum that is of interest for this article is that which has been committed by the tradition in the name of upholding their exemplar. Indeed, it seems that Renate Köbler's desire in her 1987 biography was 'to free Charlotte von Kirschbaum from the "obscurity into which some are pharisaically thankful she has fallen" and to keep her memory fresh, so that she will no longer be one of the innumerable forgotten women of history'.⁴⁴

41. Yadav's focus on changing the belief and belief systems of authority figures in his Type III solution illustrates that his model does acknowledge the influence and responsibility of persons in authority.

42. Muers, 'The Personal is the Political', p. 9.

43. Muers, 'The Personal is the Political', p. 10.

44. Köbler, *Shadow of Karl Barth*, p. 22.

Thus, the specific doxastic practice we are examining is not the phenomenon of marital infidelity by Barth, but the academic theological tradition's tendency to sideline and erase the life and work of von Kirschbaum when Barth's life and work are taught. One possible correction to such doxastic practice is for theology to explicitly name von Kirschbaum as a theologian whose work and labour were invaluable to Karl Barth.⁴⁵

Examining Barth's life brings von Kirschbaum out of the shadows of the guild, as a co-labourer to whom Barthians and the church are indebted.⁴⁶ Recognizing von Kirschbaum's contribution and influence on Barth's volumes of influential work would achieve Muers's aim of understanding theology not only as a single male individual's work. Barth's conversations with Emil Brunner and Karl Rahner are studied often; so too should his theological exchange with von Kirschbaum. Acknowledging von Kirschbaum's work necessarily requires acknowledging her moral compromise—which involves acknowledging the moral compromise of Barth as well. This necessitates regarding his legacy with a realism, removing him from the pedestal that Muers criticizes. It recognizes the scope and scale not only of Barth's influence but also that of his co-labourer von Kirschbaum.

Type III, Part 2: Addressing Diseased Theology in Barth's Writings

Seeking theological repair for places of possible infection necessarily involves approaching particular areas of Barth's work with a hermeneutic of suspicion in light of his biography. As per Plant's recommendation, one place to start is Barth's writings which deal with gender and marriage in *Church Dogmatics III/4*.

Barth dedicates *Church Dogmatics III* to von Kirschbaum, whom he calls his helpmeet. In that very volume, Barth describes a helpmeet as the one who completes his existence; a man can only be 'an I through and for this Thou'.⁴⁷ Marriage is 'the *telos* or focal point of the whole relationship between male and female'.⁴⁸ Barth describes marriage

45. George Hunsinger writes, 'as his unique student, critic, researcher, adviser, collaborator, companion, assistant, spokesperson, and confidante, Charlotte von Kirschbaum was indispensable to [Barth]. He could not have been what he was, or have done what he did, without her'. See George Hunsinger, Review of *Charlotte von Kirschbaum and Karl Barth: A Study in Biography and the History of Theology*, by Suzanne Selinger, *Journal of Religion* 80.4 (2000), pp. 685–87, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1206370>.

46. In the epilogue to Köbler's work, the editor includes a letter to Köbler that reads: 'Your article moved me very much for a number of reasons, which I would like to share with you. First, you fill a great lack, which we ... immediately felt after Lollo's death as a great injustice. We had made plans to publish a book of tributes to her and had even sent out a circular letter. But to our surprise none of those we contacted really wanted to work with us. We encountered embarrassed silence, unanticipated reservations. People were ready to love her and honor her secretly but not openly'. Hans Prolingheuer, 'Epilogue', in Köbler, *Shadow of Karl Barth*, pp. 136–37.

47. Barth, *CD III/1*, p. 149.

48. Barth, *CD III/1*, p. 142.

thus: the 'free, mutual, harmonious choice of love on the part of a particular man and woman leads to a responsibly undertaken life-union which is lasting, complete and exclusive'.⁴⁹

We find several problems within Barth's treatment of gender, which I will only list briefly before considering how they might have been problematically applied. First, if male and female can be made complete only through marriage to each other, this leaves out those who are not married: single persons, widows and widowers, and divorcees (whose reasons for divorce are complex). This creates a kind of caste system; it also buys into a kind of romanticism that places sexual-emotional fulfilment as the highest good or aspiration of the Christian, which is strange given Barth's emphasis on Jesus as the true Man and Elder Brother of humankind—for this True Man was never married and was single. One could hardly say that he did not reach his telos. Second, the emphasis on mutual, harmonious and free seems to be distant from the realities of tragedy, mental illness, disease, betrayal, trauma, abuse and loss. If, for any of those reasons, a marriage fails to be 'freely choosing', harmonious or mutual, then by Barth's reasoning, those persons could be seen as incomplete or unable to reach their telos. Such problematic reasoning could easily be harnessed to validate staying in an abusive relationship for the sake of protecting marriage-as-telos as the highest good.

The relationship of the man and his helpmeet requires further fleshing out beyond the focus of sexual desire—because articulating the relationship between man and woman primarily around sexual desire fails to address the dynamics of power and access that are intrinsic and extrinsic to that male-female relationship. The male-female I-and-Thou relationship needs a greater articulation beyond desire to be utilized in a way that avoids the centring of male individual academics at the exploitation of female labour. Those that rely on or critically engage with Barth's articulation of gender and desire would do well to examine this inheritance and to identify beliefs and aliefs which may have been embraced by leaning upon Barth's theology.

Summary of Type III Proposal for Barth

I have demonstrated a type III treatment which involves (1) a proposal on how to read and hail von Kirschbaum's work and influence in institutional spaces (doxastic practice) and (2) a critical review of Barth's theology in light of his biography. This response begins to address the possible places of infection highlighted by both Plant and Muers; if the infection is to be stemmed, both the problematic code and modus operandi must be corrected. I suggest that an appropriate response to the problem of Barth's biography involves teaching about von Kirschbaum's influence and ideas in the study of Barth as well as critically examining Barth's treatment of gender and marriage.

49. Barth, *CD III/1*, p. 140.

A Proposal Around a Type III Diagnosis and Remedy for Reading Yoder

I will now offer a Type III treatment for responding to Yoder when it comes to reading his theology and to correcting institutional practice. Scarsella has demonstrated the limitations of Hauerwas's attempts at addressing Yoder's damaging wake and troubled legacy. However, Scarsella's proposal is somewhere between a Type II and a Type III approach. I argue that creating theological space dedicated to survivors' experiences necessarily involves critically examining the diseased reading and diseased practices of those who currently rely on Yoderian logic. Given the impact of Yoder's thinking, Yoder's theology cannot be put to rest. It must be rigorously searched for infection, and a remedy must be offered—a remedy that corrects problematic assumptions to make way for healthier, less violent theology and practices.

This section will follow a different course than the previous section; I will first argue that Goossen's report demonstrates the interconnected reality of theology and institutional practice. I will then seek to augment Scarsella's account by showing how the creation of theological space dedicated to the experiences of survivors of sexual violence (doxastic practice) can help inform the employment of a hermeneutic of suspicion in Yoder's theology—and thus lead to theology-making which may mitigate against similar violence and impunity in theological institutions.

Type III, Part I: Addressing Diseased Practice that Follows Yoder's Biography

Rachel Goossen's historical report on Yoder's abuses and the Mennonite response shows the strength of Scarsella's proposal, as it is in reading the stories and experiences of the survivors that one understands how deeply the institution failed them after they tried to report the suffered abuses. Goossen's report demonstrates how Yoder's reading of Scripture influenced Mennonite leaders who attempted to pursue the 'binding and loosing' practice of reconciliation with a fellow believer.⁵⁰ Yoder was urged to submit to an accountability process 'for the sake of his broader influence and Christian ministry'.⁵¹ However, within this process, restoration of the offender was the primary aim, which did little to protect the vulnerable from further harm.⁵² Yoder's rationalization contorted his own teaching so that he could cast himself as a victim who was not being

50. Rachel Waltner Goossen, "'Defanging the Beast': Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89 (January 2015), p. 11, http://www.bishop-accountability.org/news/2015_01_Goossen_Defanging_the_Beast.pdf. Goossen writes that the Church Life Commission perceived that the Accountability and Support Group that met with Yoder over many months 'tilted in the direction of offering support to the Yoders, likely compromising their "accountability" directives. These tensions lingered through the mid-1990s'. Goossen, 'Defanging the Beast', p. 61.

51. Goossen, 'Defanging the Beast', p. 59.

52. Villegas, 'Ecclesial Ethics', p. 196.

offered the chance to face his accusers. His accusers were frightened by his presence and desired not to be in the same room again with the man who had theologically manipulated them.

Goossen's report is a chilling testament to how much energy was put into considering Yoder's well-being and restoring him to his important work as a theologian, without addressing sufficiently the trauma suffered by his female victims and safeguarding against such trauma in the future. Captive to Yoder's understanding of reconciliation, the institutions around him restored a predatorial abuser back to power—thus disregarding the restoration of the community and victims who needed to be offered restitution, resources and space to heal, with commitment by their institutions to protect against further abuses in the future. Correcting diseased practices would involve implementing measures of accountability and institutional response which help protect victims with less access to power and authority and proactively guarding against such abuses from happening in the future—and planning for how to respond if they do.

However, Goossen's account also shows the critical connection between theology and doxastic practice. It was the attempted application of Yoder's theology around reconciliation that proved to be problematic because of the flaws in the theology itself. Yoder's problematic theology made institutional reconciliation and redress stall for many decades—showing that problematic doxastic practice is linked to problematic diseased theology. Guarding against such institutional failures in the future—in both academic and ecclesial institutions, regardless of denominations—necessarily involves examining the deployment of problematic teaching and its impact on institutional practices. Thus, Yoder's theology—whose wide influence explicitly and unconsciously impacts beliefs and aliefs in theology about nonviolence and peacemaking—should not be taught without examining the thwarted attempts at bringing about accountability and reconciliation by those utilizing that very theology.

I suggest the following modification to Scarsella's proposal: in order to practise theology which listens to and honours survivors and aims to mitigate such abuse from happening in the future, particularly in institutional spaces with uneven power differentials, an iterative process is needed that (1) listens to the experiences of survivors, (2) critically engages and corrects aspects of Yoder's theology that currently influences ecclesial and theological spaces (and might prevent receptiveness to models of reconciliation based on survivors' experiences), and (3) adjusts processes of filing institutional complaints so that harm and opportunity for future abuse are removed, victim well-being is protected, and systemic accountability is more clearly followed. It is not merely a matter of which comes first, but a matter of a continued reflection and identification of key lessons and repairs needed; multiple rounds or iterations of such examination are needed. Because of the extent of Yoder's influence, multiple aliefs and beliefs may be uncovered as problematic or in need of correction through iterative listening, self-examination and reflection, and intentional change.

Type III, Part 2: Addressing Diseased Theology in Yoder's Writings

Having addressed diseased doxastic practice, I now offer one possible way to approach Yoder's theology with a hermeneutic of suspicion towards his theology of reconciliation

anchored in a certain reading of Matthew 18. This is necessary not only to make space for theology that centres the experiences and logic of victims but also to recognize where diseased theology and practices are taught and enacted currently.

Examining Yoder's articulation of Matthew 18 exposes several issues to correct. First, there are limits in applying the text to situations of vast power differentials; other scriptures should be considered so that (1) a victim is not required to face an offender who may cause greater harm and trauma if the offender has not gone through processes of rehabilitation, repentance and lament, and (2) an offender is restricted or removed from causing further abuse or harm. Samuel Villegas notes a telling emphasis that Yoder places on Matthew 18 as linked to a 'vision for transcendence' when it comes to the church. This vision of a kind of utopia is what justified the possibility of failure when it came to risks in Yoder's sexual experiments with women.⁵³ Such a utopian or transcendental slant in Yoder's theology was part of what made him incapable of seeing the potential harm in his experiments and unable to see himself as one capable of great misuse of power. I suggest that for a theologian famous for his anti-establishment position, Yoder ironically suffers from a hermeneutic of non-suspicion towards those who wield power. Consider here his writing on police in *The Politics of Jesus*:

The police officer applies power within the limits of a state whose legislation even the criminal knows to be applicable to him. In any orderly police system, there are serious safeguards to keep the violence of the police from being applied in a wholesale way against the innocent.⁵⁴

The deaths of Tamir Rice, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, among countless other unarmed black Americans killed by police, show how misguided such an assumption of trust is.⁵⁵ A theological corrective would be to re-read Yoder's writings with a hermeneutic of suspicion towards Yoder's treatment of those with power in settings that could easily be distorted by sin.

Similar beliefs about reconciliation and Matthew 18—whether inherited from Yoder's ideas, or from the same theologians who influenced Yoder—likely form aliefs which affect how Christians approach cognate conversations about race. Yoder and the Mennonites who sought to bring him into account suffered from an inadequate understanding of reconciliation. Reconciliation was perceived as about individual interpersonal conflict alone; communal reconciliation on such terms is then multiplying interpersonal reconciliation. This kind of individualistic, interpersonal orientation fails to reach conversations about systemic racism and the need for reparations and political and ecclesial repair.

Once diseased thought (beliefs and aliefs) connected to diseased practice is exposed, a remedy can be explored—which incorporates the particular experiences and logic of survivors. The repentance and restitution offered by Zacchaeus in Luke 19 could be a

53. Villegas, 'Ecclesial Ethics', p. 198.

54. John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 204.

55. See 'George Floyd: Timeline of Black Deaths and Protests', *BBC News* (22 April 2021), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-52905408>.

biblical counterpoint or way to understand restitution or reparation in situations where systemic injustice such as Yoder's sexual abuse is involved. The restoration of the community, starting with its most vulnerable and victims, should be prioritized first before attempting to address the restoration of the individual offender. Such restoration of the offender must consider both interpersonal as well as systemic reconciliation and wholeness, as restoring an authority who has not repented and gone through the work of rehabilitation and offering restitution is merely returning an abusive tyrant back to power. Re-admitting the repentant offender into fellowship should be accompanied by measures of protection against future harm. This may well include the possibility that the offender is offered some kind of forgiveness or reconciliation but will not be reinstated to places of future authority. It is one thing to say grace and forgiveness are offered to all who ask it of God; it is quite another to say that an offender is released back into the very setting of offence with no articulated commitment—by the offender as well as the system of authority—to eschewing such behaviour in the future.

Summary of Type III Proposal

I have demonstrated a Type III treatment that involves (1) critically examining the problematic doxastic practices which failed to stop Yoder's abuses and (2) a critical review of points in Yoder's theology which are connected to his biography. I have shown how the stories and experiences of survivors are critical to recognizing and confronting problematic doxastic practices (as per Scarsella's argument). However, I have argued that it is in identifying particular problems in theology and their connection to problematic doxastic practice that allows for the pursuit of theology-making that truly heeds the lessons and wisdom of survivors—in order to pursue a healthier theological imagination for the Church of the future.

The story of Yoder is also the story of the Mennonite denomination's wrestling with both theology and doxastic practice. From this broken history and the public lament and confession by the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, we see an opportunity to re-think doxastic practice when it comes to communal restoration after abuse.⁵⁶ The story of Yoder is of his great abuse, but it is also the story of the unfathomably persevering courage of those survivors who brought truth to light and confronted theological institutions and tradition with their refusal to be ignored. There is potential for a more robust understanding of reconciliation and the creation of safer spaces designed to protect against repeat abuse and lack of accountability.

Conclusion


In this article, I argued that the problem of sexual misconduct and exploitation of women in the story of Barth and Yoder requires examining and correcting both the diseased thought in the theologies of the male theologians as well as the diseased practices that

56. The AMBS response to the victims of Yoder's abuse can be found at: <https://www.ambs.edu/about/ambs-response-to-victims-of-yoder-abuse>.

led to theology-making. After proposing an adapted version of Yadav's analytical framework for diagnosis and remedy, I differentiated between the value versus the impact or influence of the theologian to argue that a realistic view of the extent of influence is the reason why theology must be examined if one is to have a sustainable pursuit of countering diseased theology-making. Using my adapted framework, I compared Plant's and Muers's responses to Barth's biography. I then analysed Hauerwas's and Scarsella's response to Yoder's story. In both cases, I argued that the authors' responses to the problem of diseased theology and diseased doxastic practice were insufficient because a Type III approach is what captures the problem and the remedy. I then demonstrated Type III treatments for dealing with particular points in the theologies of Barth and Yoder vis-à-vis their biographies.

Theologians have become increasingly aware that they do not write theology in the abstract. Even if we wish to disassociate ourselves from problematic fathers (and mothers), the reality is that their influence is all around us. To contend with the challenge of their biographies, theologians must understand how those theological progenitors theologized, how they affect the way we think, and how they impact the way the church thinks today, amidst the trauma that their biographies represent and contributed towards. Knowledge of the theological is needed to propose a change in doxastic practice. It is needed for a reconciliation that is truly structural with lasting good, with lasting liturgy that helps create a renewed practice of theology and ecclesiology—one that celebrates the fruitfulness of past faithfulness and also better trains and teaches theologians to recognize, resist, and teach others to resist, infected practices and logic. This is only possible if one learns from the past, learns what went wrong—and mercifully, in that mess, learns what can lead to thriving instead of continued harm.

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