

.John Howard Yoder: Seeking a Christian Tantra

by

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Introduction

In my article “The Church Discipline of John Howard Yoder,” (Friesen 2014), I pointed out procedural flaws in the church discipline process used against him, the confusion between morality and criminal law, and the confusion between private consensual sexual relations outside of an educational institution and those within it. We need to be careful in our language and we need to avoid unnecessary rhetorical and inflammatory language. The *Epistle of James* warns us about the misuse of our speech. Yoder’s conduct was not sexual assault, sexual abuse, violent, coercive, or a sexual violation. Nor was it “demonic,” as some have said. Yoder’s conduct was immoral, if only because Yoder was married, and some of the women who were the subjects of his experiments were also married. His teaching on sexuality was morally wrong. But a sin is not necessarily demonic.

Recognizing that Yoder’s project was immoral, can we still examine it to see where it went wrong? Can there be a sacred sexuality? Is there a theological meaning to seeking sexual ecstasy? Carole Hull, who was at the seminary at the time, has expressed regret that the feminism of the 1970’s was not able to “contribute to the formation of a healthy theology of sexuality, a theology of body-spirit wholeness” (referred to by Goossen 2016, 250). It is partly to address that issue that this article is written. To do that, I will analyze what Yoder was trying to do, how his ideas developed, why it was wrong, and what some alternatives might be. This is an attempt to understand and to clarify some issues at a time when many writers are afraid to deal with the issue of sexuality in the Mennonite church.

Naïve and Unqualified

Overall, Yoder showed an incredibly naïve lack of awareness of the implications of his sexual conduct. He did not seem to know the conservative nature of the Mennonite constituency that supports the seminary. Goshen Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana is not like the Esalen Institute in California, with its nude bathing in the hot springs and its sexual experimentation (more about Esalen below). Did Yoder really expect his seminary students to become pastors and teachers in Mennonite congregations, and to use what they learned in these experiments? How could he not have expected a reaction from the seminary and the church? Yoder was also not a qualified sex therapist or even a psychologist. He does not seem to have considered the psychological effects on himself or his students. He did not look at issues of transference and countertransference (emotional attachments between therapist and client). It seems clear that he became overly involved with some women, and this conduct cannot be construed as therapy.¹ And he was unaware of the power relations exercised by someone like himself as a person of authority within the seminary.

Pushing the boundaries of traditional morality

In their perceptive article, “By What Criteria Does a ‘Grand, Noble Experiment’ Fail? What the Case of John Howard Yoder Reveals about the Mennonite Church,” Paul Martens and David Cramer point out that the same issues of challenging morality have arisen in a case involving the denial of ordination of a woman, Theda Good, because of her sexual orientation. Some who challenged Yoder’s practices have supported her. Both Yoder and Good were transgressive of traditional morality. Both describe

¹ For example, he called unannounced at the homes of some women (Krall, 198). It is unclear whether these women were part of the experiments at the seminary.

their actions in terms of a faithful following of Jesus. But both cases came up against those who were charged with discipline, and who held contrary ideas of morality. Martens and Cramer regretfully conclude that the disciplinary process does not appear to be able to handle innovations in morality, and that the likely result is only a further split of the church. The outcome of the disciplinary process only affirms what the committee already believes.

Stephanie Chandler Burns says that even the listening process of “dialogue” has “victimized” many LGBTQ Mennonites (Burns, 80). Stephanie Krehbiel says there is evidence that Mennonite discernment processes leaves a lot of casualties, allowing white male Mennonite leadership to maintain ideological control. There are power dynamics even within the listening process of discipline. And the discipline process did not work for Yoder. He says it did not reconcile him to the church. Indeed, Yoder and his wife began attending a nearby Lutheran church, but the Mennonite church continued to discipline him. If local discipline is questioned, then what becomes of believer’s baptism, by which people agree to enter into the community of faith and to be subject to discipline?

Yoder’s Dec. 6, 1979 Memo to Marlin Miller

Rachel Waltner Goossen’s lengthy 2015 report reveals astonishing new details of Yoder’s sexual conduct. On December 6, 1979, Yoder wrote to Marlin Miller, President of Goshen Biblical Seminary where Yoder was a professor. Yoder described activities in which he and a number of women had engaged:

- superficial touch as a natural greeting
- discussion of possible deeper meaning of touch....
- more meaningful.... touch; may be a handclasp, a hug, or a brief kiss....
- Same expressions as above but they become an expectation.... May be added a closed door, lap-sitting, a less fleeting kiss.
- token partial disrobing
- total disrobing
- specific touching of penis/pubis
- exploration of partial/interrupted arousal/intermission

"Other variables," Yoder continued, "cut across these":

- Whether just once as a threshold experience or repeated;
- whether done alone or with others present;
- whether the token nudity was a few minutes or longer (Goossen 2015, 7)

In this memo, Yoder explained that the purpose of his exploratory sexual activities depended on the needs of a given woman.

- (1) Often, Yoder intended to confirm the safeness of closeness by demonstrating non-arousal.
- (2) At other times, he wanted to help the woman he was with, and to overcome the fear/taboo feeling due to simple ignorance of anatomy.
- (3) Or, in the less-frequent instances when Yoder engaged in what he called ‘partial/interrupted arousal,’ he did so to confirm to the woman that the ‘defanging’ of the ‘beast’ [of sex] is “really safe.” (Goossen 2015, 12).

Goossen says that, on reading this memo, one might have expected that Miller would have called in the police to press charges against Yoder. But she correctly points out that at that time, courts had not yet defined the nature of sexual harassment, and no universities or colleges had yet developed procedures for students to complain of sexual harassment or assault. The concept “sexual harassment” only came to have “cultural cachet” in the 1990’s, when Yoder’s conduct came to an end (Goossen 2015, 8, 19). I would add that not all the women involved were even students. Some, perhaps most,

of Yoder's contacts were outside the seminary. These included women who were Yoder's peers in age or profession. Even if there had been a policy against harassment, it would not have extended to any conduct with women outside of the seminary.

Goossen's use of language from criminal law

Even though Yoder's actions were not criminal, Goossen is inconsistent. She wonders why in the 1980's, committee members did not seek to have Yoder "arrested" (Goossen 2015, 14). A year later she says that "no one called in law enforcement, no legal charges were brought, and although several parties consulted attorneys, no lawsuits were filed (Goossen 2016, 251).

And even though the actions were not criminal, Goossen continues in her 2015 report and her 2016 article to use language derived from criminal law to describe Yoder's conduct. She uses phrases like "sexual assault," "victim," "predator," "sexual violation," and "sexual abuse." We need to be careful in our use of language. In this regard, I think that Miller, the President of the seminary, was correct in referring to Yoder's "sexual conduct" instead of "sexual assault."

The issue of consent

Can there be a valid consent when there is an imbalance of power between a professor and his student? I believe that the two issues—consent and abuse of power—should be separated. Since Yoder's time, abuse of power has been addressed by harassment policies and codes of conduct at universities.

If the women consented to the activities, then we cannot speak of abuse or violence. Commentators try to avoid the issue of consent, partly in the belief that this would "blame the victim." But to speak of "victim" is a circular argument. There is no victim if there is consent. There may be remorse about the choice that was made. I believe that there was significant trauma as a result of taking part in this sexual conduct, although there is also some evidence that some women appreciated the experiments.

But the fact that there was trauma does not mean that there was no consent. There may have been disastrous effects on the women's marriages and on their own subsequent sexual experiences. But that is not the same as lack of consent. "Elena" [a pseudonym] suffered remorse, but she clearly consented. She discussed with another woman whether she should go ahead with sexual intercourse with Yoder. The other woman did not participate. This indicates conscious consent by "Elena."

Referring to the cases of sexual intercourse discovered by the "Discernment update" 17 years after Yoder's death, Goossen says that

Some of Yoder's extramarital relationships were consensual. By contrast, some women regarded his aggressiveness as coercive and deeply harmful...(Goossen 2016, 250).

That is not a logical argument; it is not a true contrast. A true contrast would show cases where there was no consent. To be aggressive is not the same as applying coercion. Besides, the source of this information was a woman who rebuffed Yoder's advances, showing that it was not coercive. Yoder's *language* may have been abusive, but there is no evidence that it was coercive. Why are these exaggerations being made with respect to his conduct? It was immoral, it was adulterous; he probably had a sexual addiction; his experiments at the seminary were not appropriate at all. They resulted in some trauma for some people. All these things can be said. But he specifically says his actions were to show that sex could be other than rape—that is, not violent. And as we shall see, even the case (was there more than one?) of partial penetration was of a nature that required the cooperation of the woman.

Right up to the end of his disciplinary process, Yoder continued to assert his belief that the women consented to the activities. He said that whenever women declined further relationships, he respected

that (Goossen 2015, 37). As we shall see, his first invitation to the experiments was made as a result of approaches to him by three women who wanted to push his ideas further than what he had already written. And it has been observed that Yoder was always concerned to act ethically, providing justification for his behavior.

Was there abuse?

Comparisons are made to the violation of children by Catholic priests (Goossen 2015, 19). But that is not a proper comparison. Children cannot consent to sexual conduct. And Yoder should not be compared to a pedophile.

But even if Yoder's conduct was not "sexual abuse," he gave wrong teachings about relationships outside of marriage or committed relationships. Yoder's conduct was also morally wrong in that he sometimes seemed to treat the women as objects. He did not seem to care if there were casualties in his experiments.² Yoder's demeaning comments to women who did not participate in the experiments were certainly *verbally* abusive. He told them that they were "just too unsophisticated or too uneducated or too intellectually limited" (Krall, 202). And Marlin Miller certainly abused the exercise of his power as President of the seminary on at least one occasion. In "late spring" of 1979, the student "Elena"] was asked by Yoder to detail in a memo what she had been taught about Christian sexual relationships. Miller received a copy from Yoder's wife, who had intercepted the memo. Miller threatened the student with expulsion. Understandably, she sank into a depression (Goossen 2015, 31).

Should Miller have fired Yoder from his job? In retrospect, we can say that that would have been the best solution. Dismissal may have caused legal issues of employment, and the correspondence certainly shows that these issues were discussed. When Yoder was later forced to resign, Yoder complained of a lack of "due process." Would Yoder have sued for wrongful dismissal? It is unlikely. Even his eventual resignation was not done with the help of legal counsel.

Was there sexual abuse in Yoder's numerous affairs outside of the university? Here, the issue of consent is crucial, and has not been addressed by most commentators. In these outside relationships, there is no issue of imbalance of power, as in the case of professor and student. Some of these women were Yoder's peers and of his own age. Even if the seminary had had a policy against sexual harassment [it did not], that policy would not extend outside of the university setting. By not exploring the issue of consent, these commentators seem to be equating any sexual activity outside of marriage as "sexual abuse." That may be a defence of traditional morality, but not a correct analysis of the issues involved.

We should not confuse adultery, wrong teaching, verbal abuse, abuse of power, or issues of patriarchy with "sexual abuse."

Was Yoder's conduct violent?

Goossen uses the word "violent" to describe Yoder's conduct. Martens and Cramer are more careful. They say that "most" believe it was violent, or that those were the *allegations*. They refer to Yoder's own work as justification for calling his actions violent. Yoder wrote:

...As soon as either verbal abuse or bodily coercion moves beyond that border line of loving enhancement of the dignity of persons, we are being violent. The extremes of the two dimensions are of course killing and the

² Goossen 205? He likened his activity to medical research in which women bore the risk of his tests: "Only by the surgeon's risking some failures, can it be determined for which kinds of patients heart surgery or organ transplant is a risk worth running – and even some of the 'good risks' will not be healed.

radical kind of insult which Jesus in Matthew 5 indicates is just as bad. I believe it is a Christian imperative always to respect the dignity of every person: I must never willingly or knowingly violate that dignity. (March 28, 1973, Cited Martens 174 fn6)

If there was consent to the conduct by the women, then it is misleading to refer to this as “violence.” And Yoder believed that he was acting in a way that affirmed loving enhancement and the dignity of persons. His words cannot be used against him in this way.

Ruth Krall points out how feminists had extended the term “violence” to cases of rape—they adopt a “violence/victimization model.” But rape is a criminal offence, and that is not what we are talking about in the case of Yoder (Goossen 2016, 251). By referring to Yoder’s conduct as “violent,” writers seem to be judging that all of his extra-marital relationships were violent. But sex is not inherently violent and he was trying, in his wrong-headed way, to show that sex could be non-violent.

When the word “violence” is extended beyond rape and physical violence to conduct like Yoder’s, a criminal connotation is given to conduct that is not criminal. Is that not an overly-aggressive use of language? Does it not tend to demonize Yoder? Can we not apply to it Judith Butler’s characterization of attempts to delegitimize by seeking “to rename nonviolent practices as violent, conducting a political war, as it were, at the level of public semantics?” (cited Kennel 2020).

Melanie Kampen extends the meaning of violence far beyond Harold Bender’s traditional definition of violence in terms of war, weapons, and bloodshed. She extends it to “racism, anti-blackness, indigenous genocide and assimilation, homophobia, anti-queerness, sexism, and misogyny” and what she also calls Yoder’s sexual violence (Kampen, 96-97).

Hauerwas refers to a letter sent by Yoder as being “violent.” It was undoubtedly indecent, and an immoral suggestion. But there was no threat. It cannot be described in terms of violence, except by extending the meaning of the term in a way that is confusing. It is confusing because most people understand the reference to be to physical violence. For an example of horrific non-consensual and violent sex, see Miriam Toews’s book *Women Talking*, about the forced sex on drugged and unconscious women on a Mennonite colony.

When the term “violence” is used this way, its meaning is also being extended beyond the traditional view of non-violence in Anabaptist thought, which opposed participation in war. Language may be abusive, but that is not the same as sexual abuse or coercion or violence.

In a further extension of the meaning of the term, and in a surprising move towards postmodern thought, some have engaged in dialogue with Derrida’s view that our use of language is itself violent, and that every predication “x is y” involves violence (See discussion in Kennel 2020). I am astonished to see the Mennonite church, which is pre-modern and Biblicist in its sensibilities, jumping right over modernism and its belief in rationalism and human rights to seek a justification for non-violence in postmodernism. This is not the right move.

To say that all predication involves violence means that we cannot even say “Blessed are the meek” or “Yoder’s conduct was violent” without being violent. This is nonsense. The writers of the article are involved in a “performative contradiction” since their own article necessarily uses predication in language. To extend violence to predication would also mean that those who claim justice for wrongs and abuses committed against them could not speak out.³ Speaking out involves language and it

³ I accept the romantic distinction between concept and imaginative idea or symbol. But that is not based on violence, but on a seeking of transcendent fullness and unity.

involves predication, even if that means making judgments. But we need to be careful in our use of language and not ascribe criminal terms when there is no criminal conduct.

What did Marlin Miller do in response to Yoder's conduct?

Many have criticized the seminary for not doing enough to stop Yoder's conduct. Goossen suggests that Miller and the seminary were more interested in preserving the reputation of Yoder and the seminary than they were in protecting the women. And yet Goossen does mention many steps that were taken. These steps were not unsubstantial, and they did seek to protect the women:

(1) Already in March, 1979 (many months *prior* to receipt of the December memo) Miller prohibited Yoder from touching women during his counselling; Yoder was also told that he had to keep his door open and to stop initiating new "sisters" into his sexual ethics project. (Goossen 2015, 35, 38). This is around the time that Miller obtained a copy of "Elena's" memo describing her sexual experiences with Yoder.

(2) As early as September, 1979, Miller proposed sending letters of apology to women with whom Yoder had had intimate relations. It is unclear to me how many of these women were students or former students. These letters were never sent, partly because Yoder questioned whether the goal was to ask the women to apologize for their participation in adulterous behaviour. And Yoder said that the letters would violate confidentiality. He also questioned whether it would serve a purpose to let some "sisters" know that others had proceeded further in the sexual ethics project than they had.

(3) In 1980, Miller began renegotiating Yoder's contract with the seminary. So it is not quite fair to say Miller developed no plan to dismiss Yoder (Goossen, 36). Yoder was to stop the sexual activities mentioned in his December, 1979 memo. This prohibition was to be "worldwide and at all times," not just on the seminary campus, because the seminary believed that wherever Yoder went, he was acting as a representative of the seminary (Goossen 38, 44).

(4) Committees were convened. In the 1980's, Marlin convened several committees to discuss Yoder's ideas of sexuality with him. Miller did not disclose the experiments that were taking place; it was kept on a theoretical level.

(5) Miller tried to contact the women who had been subjects of the experiments. None of the women he contacted wanted to become involved (Goossen 2015, 41). At the time, Miller believed that all of the women had negative experiences but were afraid to confront Yoder. In fact, not all of the women were negative. For example, a "concerned sister" wrote to Miller on Dec. 6, 1983, indicating that she had benefitted from her time with Yoder (Goossen 2015, p 27 fn71). And, as we shall see, the experiments were initiated in 1974 at the suggestion of three women.

(6) Yoder was asked to resign and did resign, effective June 1, 1984. The resignation was drawn up without the benefit of legal counsel, but the seminary was aware of possible legal repercussions. Yoder afterwards complained that he had not been given "due process." In any event, the seminary did not disclose reasons for Yoder's resignation, other than to say that it was the result of longstanding differences. This non-disclosure is common in settlements.

A more detailed analysis of Yoder's December 6, 1979 memo

(1) Anatomy.

One of the reasons Yoder gives for his conduct is that some women were ignorant of anatomy. But the idea that a physical demonstration is required to show his students the anatomical differences

between men and women would be laughable if it were not so sad.⁴ It is like the Monty Python sketch where John Cleese gives a classroom demonstration of sexual intercourse in front of his students.

(2) Demonstrating the safeness of closeness by non-arousal.

When I first read this, I was reminded of Gandhi's experiments of sleeping beside nude women, bathing with them, and being massaged by them, in order to prove that he was not sexually aroused. In fact, he was not entirely successful in not being aroused (Adams, 245).

One who never has any lustful intention, who, by constant attendance upon God, has become proof against conscious or unconscious emissions, who is capable of lying naked with naked women, however beautiful they may be, without being in any manner whatsoever sexually excited...who is making daily and steady progress toward God and whose every act is done in pursuance of that end and no other (cited Adams 256).⁶

The young women who were involved consented to these experiments. Indeed, there was jealousy in the *ashram* as to who would be chosen by Gandhi. But despite their consent, it seems that they suffered trauma and neurosis. A "letter of indictment" sent by R.P. Parasuram to Gandhi just before he quit the ashram says

There is something or other wrong with them [the women who sleep naked with Gandhi]. [The] Punjabi girl who lived opposite my room in Matunga. She used to weep unrestrainedly and that not caring whether others saw her or not. She laughed also unrestrainedly. And then here is Dr. Sushila-behn [the 24-year-old in-house physician at the ashram who Gandhi also used for his 'experiments']. How many are the days when she has not wept? She is a doctor and yet she is always a patient, always is ill. Who has heard of a doctor who cries out at night? (cited by Banerji; see also Adams 255).

Gandhi sent a letter to one of the women he slept with, Sushila, who was then 24:

Stupid girl. If you too have experienced desire, it is as well. For then we are both in the same plight and we both ought to be on our guard...After my 69 years the vikara [lust] in you cannot affect me (Adams 225)

In the 1970's Sushila said that the idea of "experiments" came only after Gandhi was criticized for his physical contact with women. : "... in the early days, there was no question of calling this a brahmacharya experiment" (Adams 225).⁷

One of the young women was Manu Gandhi, Gandhi's grand-niece, who came to the *ashram* when she was 15. Manu "claimed to be a complete stranger to sexual awakening generally associated with a girl of her age" Gandhi was attracted to this "natural chastity." He supervised her education, her food, her dress, rest and sleep (Adams 255). In her late teens, Manu briefly submitted to Gandhi's sexual experiments, but soon withdrew her consent.⁸ Her diaries have since been published (*The Diary of Manu Gandhi 1943-1948*), detailing her life in the *ashram*. She does not say much about the sexual experiment. Gandhi believed that their purity would atone for the sins of others. On April 29, 1947 Gandhi told Manu,

I am surrounded by exaggeration and untruth. In spite of my search, I do not know where truth lies. But I do feel that I have come nearer to God and truth... I have successfully practised the eleven vows undertaken by me. This is the culmination of my striving for the last sixty years... In this *yajna* I got a glimpse of the ideal of truth and purity for which I have been aspiring. And you have fully contributed towards it.⁹

⁴ Some say that we need discernment as to what is or is not laughable (Cramer). I disagree.

⁵ There are also some *tantric* motivations in Gandhi's behavior. He was concerned that he not ejaculate, in order to store up his spiritual strength.

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⁷ Compare what Yoder's sister, Mary Ellen Meyer said about Yoder: there never was any experiment.

⁸ One of Gandhi's disciples, Amrital V. Thakkar, asked Manu to ask Gandhi to stop (Adams, 258).

Manu died at age 40, after Gandhi's assassination. Did she suffer trauma? Perhaps. A letter from Moraji Desai to Jawaharlal Nehru dated August 19, 1955 has this to say after Manu was admitted to hospital for an "unknown ailment."

Manu's problem is more psychological than physiological. She appears to have despaired for life and developed allergy to all kinds of medicines.

Like Gandhi, Yoder also referred to sleeping in the nude with women. Krall says,

He maintains that it's even appropriate for two people, who may be married to other people, to be in bed nude together, as long as they don't have intercourse. (Krall 402).

Some in the early church also engaged in the practice of "spiritual marriage," or *syneisaktism*. It goes back to at least the first century CE, and possibly to Paul's words in 1 Cor. 7:25-38. Paul says "Let even those who have wives be as though they had none. . . . For the present form of this world is passing away." These virgins, or "spiritual brides" would sleep with men in a "chaste" way. The virgins were also known as the "beloved" or the *agapetae* or *syneisaktoi*. They were female Christian ascetics who lived together with men, although both parties had taken a vow of continency. (See my discussion in Friesen 2014).

I reject as immoral any such asceticism. The initial ascetic practice occurred in the context of an imminent expectation of the return of Christ, an event that did not happen. If Gandhi's experiments reflect what Yoder was doing, then I am not surprised that some women suffered trauma. It could affect their self-image and sexual relations with others to know that a man was not aroused. In my view, this kind of experiment is more immoral than just having sexual relations.

This demonstration of non-arousal was part of Yoder's experiments. But it does not explain all aspects of them. Gandhi avoided touching the women, and Gandhi does not write about sexual intercourse or penetration. So we have to look for further explanations.

(3) Symbolic Disrobing.

It is unclear from Yoder's memo the extent of the disrobing. It could have been token disrobing, like loosening a tie, dangling a shoe, unzipping, untying, unbuttoning. Or it might have been full or partial nudity. In any event, I believe that what it was "symbolic" of was the giving up of established "oppressive" meanings imposed on one's body, a disregarding of society's rules and expectations.

(3) partial/interrupted arousal.

This is not something that Gandhi was doing with his female companions. What does Yoder mean by this? In the discussions with the committees in the early 1980's, Yoder explained that he defined this activity of "partial/interrupted arousal" as genital penetration without ejaculation (Goossen 2015, 18). Yoder claims that this kind of activity is not sexual intercourse. He regarded as permissible the activities that he called "familial" or "familiar" activity with his Christian "sisters," and he defined monogamy as simply remaining married to one's spouse.

From where did Yoder obtain these ideas of partial/interrupted arousal and of penetration without ejaculation? Although he does not use the word "*tantra*," these ideas are very *tantric*, as will be discussed in more detail below. They were also found in the utopian Oneida Community. After penetration, there is a partial arousal that is then interrupted before ejaculation. The technique to do this is called *coitus reservatus*. It is distinguished from *coitus interruptus* as well as from retrograde ejaculation. In *coitus reservatus*, there is no ejaculation, either inside or outside of the vagina. And unlike retrograde ejaculation, there is no technique of directing the semen inwards to the bladder. Once there has been penetration, the man lies very still and the woman moves only when either party senses a decrease in the man's arousal. The man needs to control ejaculation by special techniques. By an alternation

between arousal and interruption, the woman may experience multiple orgasms. Both parties can “surf” their emotions up and down, supposedly for hours. During this time, the parties may meditate. Yoder says that often they “just prayed.”

I must point out here that instances of sexual intercourse by Yoder were very rare (Goossen 2015, 11). During Yoder’s church disciplinary hearing in the 1990’s, **no evidence** was given by the eight anonymous complainants of genital penetration or sexual intercourse. In fact, two of the eight witnesses had not had any intimate relations with Yoder; they had rebuffed his advances (Goossen 2016, 251 fn20; 253).

In 2014, a “Discernment update,” was released regarding a continued examination of Yoder’s activities. They found examples of sexual intercourse. There is no discussion of whether there was consent. Nor is it at all clear that these additional events occurred at the seminary. The new report merely refers to additional evidence of sexual violation perpetrated by Yoder on many women, including students [at the seminary or at Notre Dame University?], missionaries, church workers and others. Why was the discernment committee doing this, 17 years after Yoder’s death? They were seeking to hold the institutions accountable.⁹ But it seems to me that they were also aware that the initial church discipline process was flawed and that they needed to find additional justification for Yoder’s discipline. Furthermore, if the incidents did not occur at the seminary, why would this make the seminary accountable? Even if the seminary had an anti-harassment policy, that would not apply to conduct outside the seminary. And if women outside the seminary consented to sexual intercourse, they cannot argue undue influence by Yoder as their professor.

(4) Non-violent

During the discussions with committees in the early 1980’s, Yoder used the phrase “defanging the beast.” By “defanging the beast,” he explained, he meant that he wanted to teach a woman who had expressed fear of sexual relations that what he called “familial intimacy” was demonstrably safe and not coerced—that is, not rape. (Goossen 2015, 12).¹⁰ How did his demonstrations show the women that this was safe? Safe from what? Certainly not safe from pregnancy. Even when there is no ejaculation, there is no guarantee against conception. And whatever experience these women may have had with Yoder would not have lessened their fear of rape by someone else. I think he meant safety from coercion or violence. The purpose of his “therapy” was to show women that sex can be non-violent.

(5) “Stuffing”

During the early 1980s, Yoder also described to Mennonite seminary leaders the technique of “stuffing” which “he noted was genital penetration without ejaculation” (Goossen 2015, 12 fn19). Goossen seems to think that this is just a crude euphemism for sexual intercourse, like “falling off the horse,” an expression that he also used. I believe that “falling off the horse” refers to when arousal became too strong. “Stuffing” refers to the insertion of a flaccid or only semi-erect penis into the vagina. The technique is also known as “soft penetration.” It is sometimes recommended as a remedy for erectile dysfunction.

⁹ In Anabaptist and Mennonite thought, discipline is done on a local level. The demand for accountability by a national body is really counter to that theology, and more appropriate to Episcopalian church polity.

¹⁰ The phrase seems to have come from someone else, and initially referred to masturbation as a way of controlling sex impulses. Later, Yoder seems to have extended the usage of the term to mean getting rid of the fear of genital sex.

One would think that this is not a desirable feature for sex. But early Taoist texts praise its benefits. The Taoist Liu Ching said: “Penetrate when soft and quickly withdraw when hard, making the intervals between advancing and withdrawing relaxed and slow” (Wile, 101). The ancient text *Health Benefits of the Bedchamber* refers to “inserting soft and withdrawing hard” (Wile 115).

The Heavenly Discourse of Su Nü describes 9 different sexual positions or postures, and 8 levels of penetration from “the zither strings” (one inch) to the “north polestar” (eight inches). One of the postures [“Licking Rabbit”] involves initial soft penetration. The woman sits astride backwards on the man. She takes his member and inserts it in the “house gate” and as he pierces her “zither strings,” she feels the “jade stick” become hard (Wile 125).

Exposition of Cultivating the True Essence refers to a different position with “soft entry and hard retreat.” There are breathing exercises at the same time:

The man should close his mouth and slowly execute soft entry and hard retreat. One must avoid hasty, deep penetration, but advance just half a step, and with one's own nose draw in the ch'i from the woman's nose, inhaling it to the abdomen (Wile 142).

Some contemporary “tantric” sex manuals today refer to soft penetration in terms of slow sex and meditation. You can look them up.

The detail I have given here will disturb some people. They should ask why they are disturbed. Are these just “things that we don't talk about?” Or does the discomfort reflect a dualistic view of the sinfulness of the body and of sex? One reason that the detail here is important is that it shows the degree of cooperation required from both parties. The act is consensual and non-violent. Indeed, Yoder emphasized that his purpose in demonstrating it was to show that sex could be non-violent. We can condemn his actions as immoral without calling them “violent.”

(6) Taoist sexual practice.

Taoism believes that Ultimate Reality, or the Tao, manifests itself in two polar ways: *yin* and *yang*, the yielding and the firm, earth and heaven, female and male, dark and light, intuitive and discursive thought. Taoist sexual practice seeks to achieve a unity of these polar manifestations or energies. Early Taoist texts or sex manuals also give instructions in the practice of *coitus reservatus*. One of the purposes seems to be to prevent exhaustion in the man and to allow him to have many partners. Other reasons given are more meditative, of achieving union of *yin* and *yang*. And they include the idea that semen must be conserved because of the *ching* energy that it carries, which can be converted into *ch'i* sacred energy. It is said that this not only promotes superior health but gives more pleasure than ejaculatory sex, and increase a man's love for a woman (Wile, 44). *The Classic of Su Nü* says:

When *ching* is emitted [ejaculation] the whole body feels weary. One suffers buzzing in the ears and drowsiness in the eyes; the throat is parched and the joints heavy. Although there is brief pleasure, in the end there is discomfort. If however, one engages in sex without emission, then the strength of our *ch'i* [energy] will be more than sufficient and our bodies at ease. One's hearing will be acute and vision clear. Although exercising self-control and calming the passion, love actually increases and one remains unsatiated. How can this be considered unpleasurable.” (Wile 56, 91).

(7) Tantric sexual practice

Tantra is a Sanskrit term, meaning “something woven together.” There are some who believe that *tantra* originated in Taoism. *Tantric* traditions can be found in in much of Chinese Taoism, Hindu Shakta *Tantra*, some Indian Jainism, in Tibetan or Vajrayana Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism and in many aspects of Zen.

Instead of *yin* and *yang*, *tantra* refers to the goddess of divine energy, *shakti* and the divine god *shiva*.

According to Tantra beliefs,

The universe that we experience is the concrete manifestation of the divine energy of the godhead that creates and sustains the universe. Tantra seeks to ritually appropriate and channel that energy, within the human microcosm, in creative and emancipatory ways. (Kripal 17)

Unlike Advaita Vedanta and Theravada Buddhism, *tantra* does not renounce the everyday world as *maya* [illusion], *samsara* [cycle of birth, death and rebirth] or impermanence. It emphasizes the unity of the transcendent and imminent. It sees sexual energy as a spiritual force, and the most powerful means of obtaining spiritual enlightenment and energy. Hindu and Buddhist sculptures often show copulating gods. The divine Shiva cannot be separated from the goddess Shakti. Consciousness is connected with energy. In this seeking of unity, it often transgresses normal codes of ethics. Right-handed *tantra* sublimates those acts and rituals into contemplative exercises, pure spiritual metaphors, and elaborate metaphysical systems. It avoids breaking taboos. Left-hand *tantra* insists on the actual performance of the transgressive acts and sexual rituals (Kripal 19-21).

This distinction between right-handed symbolic sexual polarity and left-handed acting out in transgressive rituals can be found in other religious traditions. In ancient Judaism, Jahweh had a female consort, whose image was in the temple. There may have been sacred prostitution, which was an acting out of the symbolism. Even after monotheism was introduced, many hundreds of years after Solomon, sexual imagery was continued in the *Song of Songs*. The divine *Shekinah* was sometimes seen in female terms. And in the New Testament, the church is referred to as the “bride of Christ.” In later Jewish Kabbalah, there was sexual imagery in the divine *sefirot* that emanated from *Ein Sof*. Weird practices ensued when mystics, both Christian and Jewish, tried to act out this symbolism (See articles in Hanegraaff).

(8) Critique and appreciation of Taoist and Tantric practices

Sexual techniques and positions are not inherently immoral. Whether or not they are moral depends on who one’s partner is, whether this is a committed relationship, and what the spiritual connections are to God and to one’s partner. Even if not immoral, there are physical warnings about sexual technique. Tantric breath control can cause hypoxia, leading to temporary amnesia or even to stroke. And some strenuous positions may be of concern for those with heart problems.

But technique alone can still be used in selfish ways. There can still be power plays between couples. George Leonard pleads for more committed erotic relationships in his book *The End of Sex*. I also recommend Norman Rush’s novel *Mating* for an exploration of what a truly equal relationship might look like. The book is about a trying to form a matriarchal utopian society in a desert village in Botswana. The fictional narrator is a woman, but the author is a man. The couple in the novel exchange being the *yin* and *yang* in the relationship. They acknowledge their love without always having to say, “I love you.” It is also an intellectual love that includes scholarly debates, jokes and conversation. Their experience is depicted like continually moving through a door of the room you are in to find a more spacious and more beautiful room. It explores equality and fairness between two very gifted people.

I am bothered by the polygamous and polyamorous aspects of the classic Taoist texts. And I find immoral the way that they depict the sexual act in terms of a battle. Sukie Colegrave is correct in her observation:

Some Chinese sex books depict the act as a battle between the two sexes, each trying to extract as much of the vital principle as possible from the opposite sex, while holding on to his or her own energy. The man, for example, tries to stimulate the female to as many orgasms as she can manage while controlling his own excitement and thus preventing the emission of his seed, his Yang force. The principle of the battle was to internalise the sexual forces so as to strengthen rather debilitate the individual (Colegrave 185).

Colegrave says there are other Taoist texts that seek a more mutual experience. Her own work seeks a synthesis of eastern and western ways of thinking about sex. She relates the polarity of *yin* and *yang* and its attempted unity to the idea of androgyny, which is more frequently found in western texts. She quotes the *Second Epistle of Clement*, where Jesus was asked when the kingdom of God would come. He replied, “When the two shall be one, the inside like the outside, the male with the female neither male nor female.”¹¹ The Catholic George Köepgen wrote about Christ’s androgyny, where “the male paired with the female in Jesus’s soul.” In Him “the tension and polaristic strife were resolved in an androgynous unity.” And she refers to Franz von Baader’s idea of original androgyny. Baader wrote that sexual love should not be confused with reproduction: its true function is “to help man and to integrate internally the complete human image, that is the divine and original image.” The androgyne was at the beginning and will be again at the end of time. The aim of marriage as a sacrament is to restore the celestial or angelic image in man. (Colegrave 197, referring indirectly to Baader *Werke* III, 308-9). We will look at Baader in more detail below, under the topic of Christian Eroticism.

Several contemporary “tantric” sex manuals seek to introduce these ideas in a loving way for couples, where there is a sharing of power and a mutual seeking of ecstasy. See for example the books by Copeland and Link, referred to in the Bibliography. These books use a pantheistic or at least non-theistic way of referring to what is sought in these practices.¹² We shall look at Reho’s attempt to find a Christian equivalent. I believe that Yoder was attempting to find this although he strayed into an immoral acting out of ideas outside of his marriage. Apart from his emphases on partial/interrupted arousal, I suspect that his reference to “lap-sitting” is also tantric; it suggests the Yab-Yum position, where the male deity embraces his female consort.

Did Yoder always believe that genital penetration without ejaculation was okay in his experiments?

In his discussion with the committees in the early 1980’s, Yoder expressed his view that genital penetration without ejaculation was not sexual intercourse. He regarded as permissible the activities that he called “familial” or “familiar” activity with Christian “sisters,” and he defined monogamy as simply remaining married to one’s spouse.

I believe that Yoder changed his views on this issue. We need to look at the sequence of events from 1974 up to the time of the 1979 memo to Marlin Miller.

(1) The Invitation, “A Call for Aid”

Much has been made of Yoder’s invitation to certain women, seeking their aid in his sexual and theological experiments (Yoder 1974b). But the invitation (a 3-page document) has not been analyzed in detail. First, it is dated July/August, 1974. That is more than 5 years before Yoder’s memo to Miller.

The invitation is directed to certain women who had expressed interest in Yoder’s lectures on singleness and marriage, and who had challenged him to go further in his ideas. Yoder says that their feedback was friendly, supportive but also challenging. “It pushes me beyond what I had written, to themes I had not studied.” This is counter to the usual idea that the idea was Yoder’s and that he was

¹¹ The *Gospel of Thomas* says something similar in verse 22: “When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male nor the female be female....then you will enter [the kingdom].”

¹² The authors confuse pantheism (everything is divine) and panentheism (in God we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).demonize

nothing but a sexual predator using theology as an excuse. Here Goossen is wrong in viewing this as just an example of “grooming” for sexual abuse (Goossen 2015, 27). The invitation also goes to the issue of consent. I am curious how many, if any, of these initial women were among the eight complainants in Yoder’s church disciplinary hearing. The names of his accusers were not disclosed to him, nor was he allowed to face them directly.¹³

(2) Familial Intimacy versus Genital Sex

The invitation refers to Yoder’s concern for single men and women in the church. He asks how these singles can be supported. Should their sexuality be repressed or sublimated or somehow expressed and channeled? Yoder refers to his previous papers on singleness and marriage.

Yoder’s article “Singleness in Ethical and Pastoral Perspective” was first written in 1974 (Yoder 1974a). He refers to the “dignity of singleness” and even its priority over marriage. But nowhere in this article does Yoder say that concern for the single person includes genital sex or penetration. On the contrary, he says at p. 7:

If we were able to free ourselves from the tyranny of assuming that relations between two persons of the opposite sex must always be seen as potential courtship, we would discover a new liberty for the expression of affection and moral support between persons, whether of the same sex or both sexes, without being frightened by the fear of misinterpretation or unwholesome development. . . .physical intimacy and *touching need not lead to sexual expression.* (my emphasis)

And in the 1974 invitation, he also draws a clear line. He says that although mature singles are to be supported, they should be

...free, as led by need, opportunity, and counsel, to relate for whatever interaction of womanliness ((manliness) is needed, *with the clearly drawn line, publicly recognized, that excludes the genital.* (my emphasis)

In the invitation, Yoder describes what he calls the “familial,” which is not excluded from what singles may do. This is the first time he makes the distinction between familiar and genital affection.

But it does not exclude familiarity. It does not exclude needing one another. It does not exclude deep trust and confidentiality. It does not exclude irrational selectivity, as selective as the married woman’s choice of just one man to accept totally—though not as narrow nor as permanent. It does not exclude working, traveling, counseling, struggling together in great intimacy. It does not exclude very specific covenanting. It may include caress, embrace, as a celebration of caring and dependency, with no fear that the natural hormonal response of the body, God’s good gift also to the single, need work destructively. It may include periods of preoccupation and concern that come and go, a kind of falling in and out of love. [I have corrected some typos in his typewritten invitation].

These are non-traditional ways of men relating to women, and Yoder discusses how traditionalists will be defensive about this. They will think it is exposing people to temptation. The references to “confidentiality,” “selectivity,” “specific covenanting” and “falling in and out of love” are red flags to me, and they should have been to the recipients of the memo. But even so, the memo must be read as a whole. It specifically excludes genital relationships, and it insists that marriage is monogamous. He calls the recipients of the invitation his “sisters.” But his suggestion of “the familial” does not extend to genital sex.

Yoder says that familial affection may include “long range bonds,” especially where a woman finds a brother/uncle/nephew whose support she finds unthreatening. Surely genital sex with uncles and

¹³ Following his discipline, he was made aware of their names, and met with two of them. Yoder expressed his regret if he had caused harm, but continued to assert that he believed there was consent.

nephews would be incest. And no one is suggesting that Yoder advocated that. So his use of “familiar” affection at this time does not include the genital.

Yoder publicly made the distinction between familial/familiar affection and genital sex in 1976.

(3) A change in viewpoint:

At some point, Yoder changed his ideas so that familiar affection now *included* genital relationships. All that he excluded was penetration with ejaculation. In discussions after 1980, Yoder defined sexual intercourse as occurring only when there is ejaculation. Yoder is clearly wrong in this view. At that time, any penetration, with or without ejaculation was considered by law to be sexual intercourse and rape, unless there was consent. Yoder is expanding what he means by his idea of familiar affection. And he is narrowing his view of the sanctity of marriage, which for him now just means that the couple stays married.

When did he change his view? I suspect it is around 1977, when he wrote the article “Resources for Singles.” That document is still kept confidential in the Yoder Digital Archives. I have not seen it. Goossen gives some quotations from that document, but her references from it do not specifically address the issue of genital sex. The document does seem to include an idea of different kinds of sexual relationships outside of marriage, and perhaps this is why it has been suppressed.

Did Yoder describe these changed views to the women involved in his experiments? Yoder’s changed view must have at least been by early 1979, when he had sexual intercourse, including partial genital penetration with “Elena.” Goossen mentions that some of the women refused his suggestion, whereas “Elena” accepted.

In any event, by the early 1980’s, Yoder was justifying this changed view to the committees at the seminary. From where did he get his views?

(4) The idea that sexuality is not merely genital.

In the 1960’s and 70’s, there were many articles decrying the usual views about sexuality as being merely about the genital.

George Leonard was a senior editor at *Look* magazine, and he published numerous articles on sexuality. He was also a close associate of Michael Murphy, one of the founders of the Esalen Institute in California. See Jeffrey Kripal’s book about Esalen, which he describes in terms of tantric sexuality (Kripal 2008).

In 1965, Murphy and Leonard coined the term “human potential.” This human potential movement would flourish at Esalen, based on a “religion of no religion,” which is also “the religion of all religions.” a kind of erotic, evolutionary nature mysticism. Many people from 1960’s and 70’s pop culture stayed at Esalen or were influential in its ideas and practices. Esalen was a place of sexual experimentation. But it also had its costs. John Heider has written about its high divorce rate, high staff turnover, and high suicide rate (Kripal 198).

Murphy had been profoundly influenced by the Hindu sage Aurobindo, at whose *ashram* in Pondicherry he had stayed for 16 months. Aurobindo was a neo-Hindu, influenced by both Hindu and Western traditions. He wrote *The Life Divine* in English. Aurobindo wanted to synthesize the Hindu tradition of consciousness of *Brahman*, and the energy of *shakti* in *tantra*. Aurobindo came up with the idea of Supermind, a nondual reality of both spirit and matter, consciousness and energy. The human potential is illustrated by *kundalini* yoga, with its image of a coiled serpent at the base of the spine, whose energy ascends through various *chakras* or channels, and finally unites with the divine above the brain. Kripal claims that almost every technique at Esalen relied on these tantric psycho-

physical methods. Yoga speaks of sex as “erotic bliss,” and the secret is to enjoy *shakti* [sacred energy] in the soul as one enjoys a woman with the body (Kripal, 28; 60-64).

Kripal says of Leonard:

Leonard believed in mysterious powers (and costs) of repression and sublimation, the sexual dynamics of the family, the power of eros to bind social groups together, and the potential beauties of mystical eroticism beyond any kind of simple genital sexuality. . . Leonard thus wants to re-conceive the erotic beyond genital sexuality and reunite it with creativity, with society, with nature, “and perhaps with the stars. (Kripal 219).

Leonard’s many articles included one that he wrote with Marshall McLuhan, where he distinguished between “hot” and “cool” sex. While not totally happy with this terminology,¹⁴ the Francoeurs expanded on these ideas in their 1973 article “Hot and Cool Sex: Fidelity in Marriage.” Hot sex is focused on genitals, orgasm, and intercourse. It is the realm of Playboy images, techniques, mutual orgasm at all costs; it is impersonal—one person is the same as another. Hot sex has to be scheduled, arranged, planned both in time and place. It is male-dominated, patriarchal. It is a “monomania for the interlocking of genitals.” Genital sex becomes an end in itself, for ego satisfaction. Hot sex is the forbidden fruit, the thrill of cheating, the escape from boredom. In hot sex, marital fidelity becomes synonymous with genital exclusivity; intimacy can only mean sexual intimacy. For a hot sex culture like America, every sexually mature single person is a threat. The unmarried, the widowed, the divorced—all are obviously sex-starved. Intimacy of any kind with them must be resolved as soon as possible by marriage. An affair must lead to divorce and remarriage. In hot sex culture, a wife is a woman you marry to take her out of circulations o she can provide you with a family. Hot sex is dualistic; really despises the body. It is ultimately antiseptic and unsensual.

Cool sex is more diffused and more sensual. It is a relationship of peers, between two evolving, developing, maturing and unique sexual person. For cool sex, a man or woman must first be secure in their self-image, without relying on the blessing of society’s stereotypes, such as breadwinner, housewife, parent, married couple, fair white maiden (the sexless school teacher), dark lady (seducible secretary), and double standards. Cool sexual consciousness celebrates the body in the tradition of Solomon’s “Song of Songs.” Instead of focusing on genital intercourse, it seeks to integrate a whole range of bodily intimacies, touching, nudity and sensuality along with intercourse. Cool sexuality is not disturbed by nudity or scandalized by “immodesty,” as when David danced before the Ark.

John Heider was another important participant at Esalen. He was not impressed with the drifting from one pseudo-spouse to another pseudo-spouse. In an essay “Electric Sex and Magnetic Sex,” he distinguishes between genital or “electric sex,” which zaps the body into arousal and sparks an electric current through which the sexual energies can arc and discharge, and “magnetic sex,” which is diffuse and spreads over the whole body. It need not lead to orgasm. Instead, the fields of two people awaken and make contact. Energies are sublimated into deeper and deeper states of bodily bliss and contemplative consciousness (Kripal 218). Kripal says that Heider was seeking a new covenant, a new law, not from Paul or Christianity, but from Asian Tantra, “to help people become increasingly married to one another and to the cosmic whole” (Kripal 363).

In 1980, George Leonard wrote the article “Why We need a New Sexuality.” He says that in the future, sexual intercourse may decrease because of an understanding of a wider meaning of sex. Erotic impulses, although concentrated in the familiar zones, can actually be felt all over the body:

¹⁴ Normally, McLuhan used “hot” and “cool” to refer to the media, not the content. Here, the distinction is with respect to content. Also, “cool” has too negative a connotation for what is being recommended.

The same neural-hormonal forces that cause an erection can make the sky look bluer, a song ring clearer. Sex involves not just coitus but birth, child-rearing, family patterns, uses of affection and personal role in the world. Those censorious people who think they are protecting us from sex are just wringing the joys out of living by pressing sexuality into a dark corner—thus making it far more dangerous.

He says, “We need a new sexuality, a new sensuality,” where members of the opposite sex can touch and caress without fear of seductiveness. “The empirical evidence so far indicates that swapping bed partners does not work. But sexually exclusivity shouldn’t mean (as it now does) emotional and sensual exclusivity.”

The theologian Harvey Cox reviewed George Leonard’s 1972 book, *The Transformation*.¹⁵ (Cox was also a visitor to Esalen, and in his 1973 book, *Seduction of the Spirit*, he writes about the sexiness of his bathing and group massage experiences there. But it was both sexy and spiritual—the self and others were “subsumed under an impersonal or superpersonal It.” He says he was not converted to *tantra*, or Hinduism, but he came away with an understanding of what they were about. At Esalen there was no requirement that nakedness had to proceed to intercourse (Cox, 205-211). Cox wrote about this distinction between affection and genital sex:

In our confusion we have so narrowed the range of allowable physical contact that most adults live with a constant, if only dimly conscious, need to be touched, cuddled and embraced... is easy to confuse the need for mere gestures of affection with the need for coital intercourse (Cox, 215)

The novelist Aldous Huxley refers to *coitus reservatus* in his novel *Island*, about a utopian island where certain people find themselves after a shipwreck. The people mated there freely with another using “Maithuna,” a yoga of love. Huxley admitted that this was basically the same as male continence, in the sense of *coitus reservatus*.

Already in 1958, Alan Watts, known for his writings on Zen Buddhism, advocated for *coitus reservatus* as a form of meditation and spiritual communion. He said that was far superior to normal intercourse, which he defined as a mere “sneeze in the loins.” In contemplative love, nothing needs to happen; a man and woman are together, exploring their spontaneous feeling. Technique is only secondary.

It is at this juncture [the moment of penetration] that simple waiting with open attention is most rewarding. If no attempt is made to induce the orgasm by bodily motion, the interpenetration of the sexual centres becomes a channel of the most vivid psychic interchange ... Although the man does nothing either to excite or withhold orgasm, it becomes possible to let this interchange continue for an hour or more, during which the female orgasm may occur several times with a very slight amount of active stimulation, depending upon the degree of her receptivity to the experience as a process taking charge of her ... it may happen that they prefer simply to remain still and let the process unfold itself at the level of pure feeling, which usually tends to be the deeper and more psychically satisfying way. (Watts)

5) Familiar/familial affection.

Yoder’s use of the term “familiar” instead of “familial” is unusual. After a long search, I came up with a reference to “Familiar Affection” in Leonard’s book *The End of Sex*. It was published in 1984, a time when Yoder was resigning from the seminary. But even Leonard’s book does not include genital or sexual intercourse in his description of Familiar Affection. It is instead a general eroticized feeling. In early childhood, we first awaken to desire. But it is a constrained, familiar desire.

Instead of specific knowledge and experience [of sex] I had a whole world that was erotic: the hum of insects, the song of birds, my sister’s laughter, the feel of sun on skin, the sinuous slow-motion swing of oak boughs in the wind. Sometimes on those summer days, I looked at the way a tall, straight pine tree was thrust into the earth, the power and intimacy of that joining, and once more I would become dizzy with wonder and frustration and

¹⁵ Review In *Psychology Today*, Feb. 1973.

desire. I knew only that there was a force, a powerful erotic force, that permeated all things With every cell of my body, I longed for—*what?* I was in love with, in lust with, the whole world (Leonard 1984, 49-50)

He describes how his sister at the age of 14 “became an erotically desirable female.” Even then he did not have any thought of sexual intercourse. He sublimated his feelings and directed the energy into playing music in a band.

Like Yoder, Leonard also says that singles need a safe place. But that safe oasis constrains Eros:

More than ever now, I feel we need families that are warm and loving, in which intimacy and physical touch are the rule, not the exception. But each of us probably also needs an oasis where love can be freely expressed and experienced with no worry about eventual seduction or exploitation. Eros is present within the family—there’s no question about that—but within that magic circle Eros is constrained. And it is precisely that constraint that forces us into freedom... We must reach out beyond what is familiar and make new worlds of love. (Leonard 1984, 67)

Leonard continued to distinguish between a focus on genital sex and lovemaking:

Genital penetration followed by orgasm is not the sole purpose of lovemaking. Better to approach the erotic encounter as a process involving gentle touch and talk and having no specific goal. Orgasm can be reached by means other than penetration, and thus the less aroused partner can be relieved of performance pressure. (Leonard 1984, 136)

...genitals bring fast, temporary relief [for some unspoken resentment] like nonprescription drugs. But in the long run, this deadens the emotions, dams the flow of feelings, armors the body and the self against itself (p. 174)

His book is a plea for more commitment. He points out (p. 211) that open marriages last an average of only two years.¹⁶ Even if one cannot find a permanent committed relationship, “everyone can be caring rather than mechanical, giving rather than manipulative (p. 216). A fall in affection should be regarded like a change in the weather, something temporary that will pass. Erotic love is not predictable (p. 216).

And so, despite a lot of literature in the 1970’s and 80’s about sexuality being more than just the genital, I could not find anyone who advocated genital sex for familial or familiar relationships, except in those cult movements like the Manson movement that described the cult community as a family. I don’t think that Yoder was influenced by them.

(6) The Oneida Community: extended family and *coitus reservatus*

The Oneida Community did see genital sexuality as part of familial love. The family was defined broadly as a community. Oneida was a utopian community founded by John Humphrey Noyes in the 19th Century. It was the most successful commune in American history. Noyes believed that the Second Coming of Christ had occurred in 70 CE at the time of the destruction of the temple, and that Christians now had to demonstrate heaven on earth. Although the Bible says there will be no marriage in heaven, Noyes interpreted this to mean that there would be no monogamous or exclusive marriage. In his utopia, which at one time numbered about 300 members, all property was held in common, and everyone lived in the same building, and had sex together. This was not exactly free love, but what Noyes called “complex marriage.” Noyes emphasized that everyone was part of the family of God, and members were referred to as “brother” and “sister.” Noyes distinguished between “amatory intercourse” and “sexual intercourse.” Only sexual intercourse involved the propagation of children.

¹⁶ Instead of the “serial monogamy” of divorce and remarriage, the Francoeurs had advocated open marriage, what they call “comarital or satellite relations.” (Francoeur, 26). Fidelity for them is based on their understanding of the Hebrew *hesed*, as “loving concern” (p. 32). The importance is not what lines are crossed, but the “quality and intent of the satellite relationships.” (p. 36).

Monogamous marriage was antithetical to the larger social and kinship ties of “family.” Love was to be expressed freely among all God’s saints.

Amatory intercourse used a technique of intercourse without ejaculation. It was a sharing of what was believed to be divine electric energy. This energy bound all members of Christ’s body, and it needed to be fluid, open and balanced. Noyes described sexual union in mystical terms:

It is an expression of selflessness drawing the partners closer to one another and to God. In sexual intercourse, men and women flow into each other’s hearts through an exchange of magnetic influences and “express their unity of hearts by bodily unity.” The spirit of God (whose nature is bisexual and dual) passes between sexually conjoined partners and they “return to the conditions of Paradise, and become what Adam was before the fall, a male and female unit.”⁴³ Sexual conjunction is “the image of the glory of God—the physical symbol of life dwelling in life, which is the mystery of the gospel.” (Wonderley 163).

Establishing the heavenly conditions on earth is “the very means by which the resurrection power is to be let in upon the world.” We are to break up the social system of the world, and establish reconciliation of the sexes (Wonderley 166). The men had to be trained in this. Noyes believed that limiting sex to traditional Christian marriage would leave most young people facing sexual starvation from puberty until marriage. At first, boys were allowed sex with women past menopause. They needed to learn the technique of what Noyes called “Male Continence.” Noyes wrote an article with that title (Noyes 1872). It is really *coitus reservatus*.

But amatory intercourse was not a “sticky” kind of love, with attachment another person. A brother must give up a sister for the sake of any brother who wanted amatory intercourse (Kern, 674). And apart from this amatory intercourse, which was highly regulated (by appointment), a brother and sister were not to be unnecessarily alone, except to do a necessary duty or errand. Nor should they touch each other unnecessarily.

Noyes believed that he had discovered the practice of *coitus reservatus* on his own. But we have seen that there is a long history and practice of the idea.

In 1869, Noyes embarked on a further experiment in eugenics, which he called “stripiculture.” This was actually incestuous. He justified it on the grounds that primal Adam’s relationships were also incestuous since there were no others to breed with (Kern 250, fn59). Divisions arose in the community, and when Noyes was about to be arrested, he fled the country.

In 1879, the commune was dissolved and was turned into a stock company, with all members receiving shares. Its business was the making of Oneida silverware. Interviews of members after the breakup provided some surprising information. Most women were happy with the practice of male continence. There were few unplanned pregnancies. There was less incidence of psychological disorders than in society at large. The guarantees for women and children (communal child rearing) were greater than in a private family. Noyes’ son Pierrepont recollected a quality of “restrained romantic excitement pervading and invigorating community life. ” It was described by Abel Eastman as “continuous courtship” (Foster, 83-84, 88).

Yoder was clearly aware of the Oneida community. In the 1970’s, and 80’s he lectured on Oneida, and referred to Utopian communities, some by

...biblical reformers including John Humphrey Noyes (1811-96), founder of the Oneida (New York) Community. The thrust of these approaches is the belief that the entire social order needs to be reviewed and renewed. The way to proceed is to build speculative utopias in the air (that is, in literature) and concrete experimental ones in America. (Yoder 2009, 263-64).

If applied to sexuality (and Yoder must surely have been aware of Oneida's practices here), Yoder's distinction between literary explorations of utopia and concrete experimental ones is similar to that between a symbolic right-handed tantra and a concrete experimental left-handed tantra.

The Oneida experiment worked for more than 30 years. I do not think it is a model to follow today.

Dualism, asceticism, and sexuality

Why are ideas of sexual ecstasy so foreign to most Christians? Part of the problem is the dualistic view of God and creation, Spirit and matter that has so long pervaded Christian thought. There is no doubt that the church developed a dualism of flesh and spirit, and a depreciation of the body and of desire. I believe that it is important for Christians to recover a positive view of sexuality. I have addressed issues of dualism in my book *Christian Nondualism in Jewish Historical Context* (Friesen 2021). I have addressed the historical depreciation of the body in Mennonite thought (Friesen 2014)

As Yoder pointed out, Jesus and the early church devalued marriage and sexuality in view of their belief in the "shortness of time" before the coming of the Son of Man and the judgment of the world (Yoder 1974a). I agree that this is an issue. But this has led me to the conclusion that Jesus's ethics—including his ideas on non-resistance and pacifism—were an "interim ethic" that was meant to apply in the period awaiting the second coming. The early church thought that Jesus would soon return as the Son of Man. This event was expected within the lifetime of the disciples. It did not occur. Many of the ethics of Jesus do not work as a program for life today. Yoder would disagree; he did not think it was an interim ethic but one that continued to apply for life today.

I think that this caused problems for him in thinking about sexuality. How do we honour sexuality when Jesus and the New Testament promote an asceticism and denial of the importance of sexuality and marriage? Even Jesus's pronouncements about the family are not very encouraging. He had hard words about his own family of origin. And there are no words in the New Testament encouraging having children or celebrating the joys of family and marriage. Jesus did say, "Let the little children come unto me," and thereby encouraged us to adopt a childlike attitude. But he did not encourage having children. He warns against those who are with child who will have to flee in the end times. This should be contrasted with Judaism, which celebrated family and marriage. Rabbis were expected to be married, not celibate (Boyarin 1993).¹⁷

Yoder tries to enlist Jesus in support of his ideas. He writes about Jesus allowing women to touch him, and that he associated with sinners. True, but this does not at all equate to Yoder's ideas of sensual and sexual touch. Jesus was thoroughly Jewish, and he upheld the Torah. In fact, he made it even stronger, in his prohibition against divorce, and in his idea of "ocular adultery" or adultery of the heart—that lusting after a woman is equivalent to adultery (Matthew 5:28). Yoder tries to turn this around by saying that Jesus was saying that men could look at a woman without lust (Yoder 1975), but I don't think this is the right interpretation. Even angels lusted after women, and that is why Paul advised them to wear head coverings in church (1 Cor. 11:10). This is from the tradition of bad angels who fell and had sex with the "daughters of men" (Gen. 6:2, as elaborated in the *Book of Enoch* I, chapters 7-8).

Paul changed this (for example, weakening Jesus's views on divorce and disregarding kosher rules), but Paul's own churches were left with issues of antinomianism and extreme behaviour, including

¹⁷ Yoder rejected the Jewish model as the ideal, in favour of his idea of singleness.

sexual issues. Catholics rely on pronouncements from the Pope. Protestants are left to work out these issues, usually on a more local level.

Yoder might be better basing his ideas on the apocryphal *Gospel of Philip*, where it is said that Jesus kissed Mary Magdalene and loved her more than the other disciples. Contrary to popular novels today like *The Da Vinci Code*, I don't think that this means a sexual affair with Mary, but I do think that Mary Magdalene's role needs to be reconsidered, perhaps as the ritually adopting virgin mother, in a ceremony for Jesus's inauguration as Messiah or king (Friesen 2021).

We need to avoid a dualism between body and spirit and we need to develop a Christian eroticism.

A Christian Eroticism

A few writers have tried to combine Christianity and *tantra*.

1. *Towards a Christian Tantra: The Interplay of Christianity and Kashmir Shaivism*

The author John R. Dupoche is a Catholic priest, interested in Christian-Hindu dialogue. He points out that *tantra* is more than just different approaches to sexuality. Especially in its form of Kashmir Shaivism, it emphasizes a nondualism that is not monistic. In contrast to Vedanta, which holds that Brahman is the sole reality and the world is only illusion (*maya*), *tantra* emphasizes the reality of the world as a manifestation of *Brahman*.

Dupoche refers to Henri Le Saux (Abhishiktananda, a French Benedictine priest who was a pioneer in Hindu-Christian dialogue, and the Hindu sage Ramana Maharshi whom he sought to emulate. I have written about both Abhishiktananda and Ramana Maharshi, showing the influence of *tantra* on both (Friesen 2015a and 2015b). Interestingly enough, Ramana was influenced by a disciple's experience with Aurobindo's *tantrism*. As already discussed, Aurobindo's ideas influenced Michael Murphy, founder of Esalen. Ramana's idea of enlightenment within this life is a tantric idea, and it is at variance with the traditional Vedantic view that enlightenment is possible only after death.

Nevertheless, Ramana and Abhishiktananda tend to interpret union with God (Brahman) in Advaitic monistic terms. They would have been better to frame their ideas of nonduality with God in terms of the modified nondualism (*vishishtadvaita*) of Ramanuja, who maintained a distinction between the individual and *Brahman*. In order for us to love God and be loved by God, there must be a distinction, an "other" that is not merged into the One.

Dupoche promotes monasticism as the highest goal, and interprets bliss as in the advaitic sense of union with God. There is little discussion of sex between couples. And like Abhishiktananda, Dupoche does not adequately account for the historical Jesus and his very temporal mission as Messiah.¹⁸

2. *The Tantric Jesus: The Erotic Heart of Early Christianity*

This is a much more ambitious attempt to integrate Christianity and *tantra*. It includes some specific advice for couples seeking sacred lovemaking within a Christian context. The author, James Hughes Reho, is an Episcopalian priest. The introduction to the book is by the well-known theologian Matthew Fox. I recommend the book, but with some very important qualifications.

¹⁸ I have stayed at the *ashram* founded by Abhishiktananda. And, beginning in 1971, I have twice visited the *ashram* of Aurobindo, who influenced Murphy of the Esalen Institute. I was there when the Mother was still alive. And I have stayed at the *ashram* founded by Ramana Maharshi. In my book on Ramana, I discuss how Aurobindo indirectly influenced Ramana through Ramana's most important early\ disciple..

The biggest problem with this book is that, like most writers who emphasize the Cosmic Christ, it takes a non-historical view as to what it means for Jesus to be the Christ. “Christ” or *Christos* originally meant “anointed one” or “Messiah,” and this was originally intended as a very temporal kingship. As I have written elsewhere (Friesen 2021), Jesus and the early church believed that he would return as the Son of Man/Messiah in a very temporal way, within the lifetime of his disciples. This did not happen. And so the church developed a theology of Jesus’s return and presence in another way, such as in the eucharist. In so doing, the church re-interpreted the historical mission of Jesus into something else. And so Reho emphasizes texts like the later *Gospel of Thomas*, which sought other ways of understanding Christ after he failed to return.

Reho defines Christ as “none other than our deepest identity, discoverable both in the world and deep within” (p. 42). We need to understand that this was not the original meaning of Jesus’s life and work, even for himself. And he defines Jesus’s ascension as a way of depicting Jesus’s permeation of all reality (p. 67). If it is accepted that this is a re-purposing of symbolism for a new spirituality, then this book can be helpful. It will not be acceptable to those Mennonites who (also mistakenly) believe that they are following the example of the historical Jesus and the early church.

My second objection is in the very title. “Tantric Jesus” suggests a Jesus who was involved in *tantric* sex. I do not at all believe that was the case. Jesus’s views were highly ascetic and opposed to marriage and family. This is because of his views on the imminence of the coming judgment where he would appear as the Son of Man. He preached woes to those who would be with child at that time. He even advocated becoming a eunuch for the kingdom of God. Instead of “tantric Jesus,” I prefer to speak of a “nondualistic Jesus,” whose ideas were contrary to dualisms of body and soul, whose kingdom was “on earth as it is in heaven,” and who preached that we could all be children of God. These nondualistic ideas can be compared to the nondualist ideas of *tantra*, and it is only in that sense that we can speak of a “tantric Jesus.”

The author also engages in Hindu-Christian dialogue, including references to Ramana and Abhishiktananda. As I have in my own books, he understands nonduality as “not-two”, which is not the same as the “only One” of *advaita*.

Reho sees a Christian view of sacred sex as restricted to “one’s beloved, spouse or life partner” (p. 453). Interestingly enough, he advocates *coitus reservatus*—“slow love” instead of “hot” sex. Tantric sex is “about the ability to open the heart and body in vulnerability and love toward our partner, and through our partner to God.” And Reho emphasizes that same-sex love can also open our hearts in the same way. We reach a state where we are “not-two with each other and not-two with God. This can lead to deep healing of issues of abandonment, body image and self-worth (pp. 454-5, 463).

Reho lists five important “roots of Christian tantra:

- (1) The Reality and Goodness of the World. The world is not an illusion, as in Vedanta. Nor is it something to flee from to find the divine presence. Nor is it an escape from embodiment to some spiritual realm.

- (2) Christ as *Shakti* or divine energy, as the feminine face of the Divine. This idea is odd until we realize that Reho is interpreting Christ as the energy that is the Word/Sophia that creates that world and sustains the world. This is partly a reinterpretation of Christ and Trinity, and partly an accurate account of how the feminine side of God was lost within Judaism, beginning with the reform of King Josiah around 623 BCE, changing the worship of Jahweh’s consort Asherah in Solomon’s temple to monotheism (p 96). Yet he points out later rabbinic writings that refer to the *Shekinah* as the feminine

aspect of God. And I appreciate Reho's reference to Margaret Barker's interpretation of the *Book of Revelation* as an attempt to bring back these old ideas of the divine feminine into the church (p. 100).¹⁹

(3) The body as the temple of God. The body is not to be devalued, but it is where we meet the divine. Our anthropology needs to emphasize the potential of deification rather than that of sin. He cites Psalm 82:6: "You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you."²⁰ We find the divine presence in the deepest part of our self, the "cave of the heart" (a phrase that Abhishiktananda used). We need to be present to our life in love, in an "embodied process of becoming whole." As embodied beings, we are potential mediators of the sacred, a vehicle of the sacred (p. 58). Reho cites the *Book of Common Prayer*: "With my body, I thee worship." (p. 424).

(4) Eros and Antinomianism. Antinomianism is action that is contrary to prevailing standards of morality. The law of love sometime opposes the rules of society. Jesus violated the law of the sabbath for the law of love. In this, Reho is too selective in his portrait of Jesus, and does not recognize that Jesus strengthened the observance of law. For example, Jesus made divorce more difficult. And Jesus forbade even lustful looks as adultery. Reho does not recognize how later New Testament works such as the *Gospel of John* interpreted Jesus as opposing Jewish tradition, whereas in fact Jesus was wholly within the Judaism of his time. Reho interprets Jesus's admonition to "be perfect" as a plea for us to become whole, integrated and actualized (p. 42).

(5) Jesus as our guru or teacher. What Christ is, I am or can become. He quotes several church fathers and mystics that God became human so that humans might become divine. To do this, we need to relinquish our self-control. (p. 229).

3. Franz von Baader's Philosophy of Love

Many of these same nondualist ideas can be found in the nineteenth century Christian theosophist Franz von Baader (1765-1841). Although he is not well known today, Baader had a profound influence on philosophy. He introduced Hegel to the mystical ideas of Meister Eckhart, and he introduced Schelling to the theosophical ideas of Jakob Boehme. I believe that his ideas were transmitted to the neo-Calvinist philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd (Friesen 2015c).

Baader is difficult to read, and although I have translated some of his work, most of it remains untranslated into English. I have tried to summarize some of his thoughts on love in my 2016 article, "Sophia, Androgyny and the Feminine in Franz von Baader's Christian Theosophy" (Friesen 2016).²¹

For those to whom orthodoxy is important, Baader had a very high Christology and Trinitarianism. But he emphasizes the transcendent Christ and not the historical Jesus or a temporal Christ/Messiah. Baader does seek what I have called a Christian nondualism, bridging the dualism of body and soul, time and eternity.

Baader's entire philosophy has been described as a "philosophy of love." I recommend the book by Ramon Betanzos, *Franz von Baader's Philosophy of Love*. It stresses the importance of love within the Godhead, of love from God to humans, of love of humans towards each other, and of love from humans towards temporal reality. With respect to relations between men and women, Baader aims at

¹⁹ See Friesen 2021, where I discuss Margaret Barker's ideas.

²⁰ It should be noted that the beginning of the Psalm refers to the gods in the divine council, and not to humans. A better choice would be those texts that speaks of us all being sons of God (Gal. 3:26; 4:7; 2 Cor 6:18; Rom. 8:14; John 1:12).

²¹ For references to Baader's *Werke* and to other citations, see my 2016 article.

a true reciprocity between the two sexes, with the ultimate goal of restoring what he believed to be an original androgyny.

Feminine and masculine within God:

Androgyny is the idea that the masculine and the feminine were not initially separate from each other. Instead, these qualities were combined in a unity. There are feminine and masculine principles even within the Godhead. God should not be regarded as male, for that is a term resulting from division of the sexes. For Baader, each Person of the Trinity has both masculine and feminine qualities. The Father generates or 'begets' the Son ("the only begotten Son of the Father") and the Holy Spirit is the process or act of that begetting. The Father is divine will or thought (the inner Word), the Son is the expressed Word, and the Holy Spirit is the activity, the power of God. But this 'begetting' or 'generation' is not to be understood in a sexually differentiated way, for such differentiation occurs only within the fallen creaturely world. The Father has both a generating masculine potency and a feminine birth-giving potency

God created the world by Wisdom or Sophia, but that does not mean that a male god created with the help of a female goddess. To speak of male gods and female goddesses merely continues the separation of the sexes, instead of viewing them as a unity. Sophia is neither male nor female, but contains the perfection of both sexes. But in Sophia's dealings with humanity, Sophia appears as a man to the woman, and as a woman to the man.²² Baader also calls this Sophia "Maya." But he distinguishes this from the deceiving kind of *maya*. There may be some comparison with Kashmir Shaivism, which refers to *maya* as the power or *shakti* of Brahman. The world is illusion only when it is thought of apart from Brahman.

Feminine and masculine within nature

There also an androgyny in nature, since there is a polarity in all existing things. Opposite forces in nature are androgynous, as is the character of energy as both action and reaction.

Feminine and masculine within humanity

Humans were created androgynous, in God's image, not as half an image as man or wife. Male and female created he them. But as a result of the fall into sin, humans were divided into two separate sexes, and given physical means of procreation.

As already mentioned, Baader did not believe that sex's only purpose is for procreation. Baader does not dwell on techniques, but he does refer to the ecstatic nature of sex. In some of his articles, he explored the nature of ecstasy, which is an *ek-stasis*, a standing outside of oneself. Lovers ought to consider such rapture or ecstasy as a summons to become inwardly what they imagined they were in the infatuation of early love, when they imagined the other as better than he or she was in reality. Our first love shows us the possibility of what we may become (androgynous wholeness)

Baader opposes puritanical as well as some romantic ideas of love. He sees erotic love as a reaching for an original unity, and for the presence of God. It is a self-giving that he compares to Christ's *kenosis* [self-emptying]. It is a giving up of selfishness. Love requires humility. Union in love demands complete self-emptying of the lovers, in mutual subordination to the other. This is not something they

²² There are similarities to C.G. Jung's idea of the image of the *anima* within men and the *animus* within women. But we know that Jung had read Baader.

can do alone. It is only when each gives himself entirely to God that God gives the other completely to each of them.

And love is a process of actually becoming one with one's partner. By temptation, trial and forgiveness, this love is tested and refined.

Baader is adamantly opposed to asceticism and monasticism. He said that any true spirituality *requires* our embodiment. The center of our being always requires a nature in which to express itself, and even God has a nature. Baader believed in the institution of marriage. He had two children by his first wife. After she died, he married a second time to Marie Robel, who was 50 years younger. So there was certainly no idea of celibacy or ascetic opposition to marriage. The aim of marriage is to reintegrate both husband and wife into the original androgynous integrity of the image of God.

The essence of love is union and harmonization, where two people are subjected to a higher third, Eros, to whom they have subjected themselves. A Higher Being loves himself through the lovers.²³ Love of our neighbour is based on our love of God. We love each other only in and through a third.

Some readers, under the influence of postmodernism, will argue that any idea of seeking a unity of male and female, whether using ideas of tantra or of androgyny, is itself wrong and that it "totalizes" our experience. In emphasizing unity, it disregards individuality. I disagree, but I leave that to another discussion. I cannot understand spirituality in any other way. I am sympathetic to the LGBTQ movement, and I hope that the idea of seeking a transcendent unity can also fit their experience.

Conclusion

I was brought up in the Mennonite tradition, and I am still a cultural Mennonite of the borscht and *Pfeffernüsse* kind. I still care about the Mennonite church, even if I am not a member. I have set out my disagreements in my 2021 book, even though I still respect what used to be its core ideas of community, simplicity and international aid.²⁴ With respect to non-violence, I take a less extreme position. We should try for peace but also recognize the just use of force.

I have watched the process of assimilation of Mennonites with "the world." I believe that Yoder's sexual conduct has accelerated that process in many ways. It is causing a reassessment of the church's relationship to legal issues and to matters of individual human rights. It has led to a reexamination of core beliefs like non-violence, the discernment process, and even what it means to be a "believer's church." As the church moves away from a Biblicism, it has tried to find other ways of justifying its beliefs. Yoder's case also brings to the fore many ethical issues such as abuse of power and patriarchy, even within the discernment process. It has opened the issue of challenges to traditional morality, whether by Yoder or others. And it raises again the issue of what Christian sexuality can look like.

I reject as immoral Yoder's sexual experiments outside of committed relationships, even if it is not accurate to describe them as violent or abusive. Yoder seems to have confused ascetic and ecstatic views of sexuality. And he certainly confused familiar affection and genital sex. I emphatically reject

²³ This is similar to neo-Hinduism's idea of *tat tvam asi* [That art thou]. Vivekananda introduced the idea to neo-Hinduism, but he was influenced by Paul Deussen, who gave a lecture in Bombay on February 25 1893 on *tat tvam asi* as the foundation of ethics. Deussen was in turn influenced by Boehme, whom he described as "a religious and philosophical genius." He gave a lecture on Boehme in Kiel on May 8, 1897 and wrote about him *Jakob Böhme: Über sein Leben und seine Philosophie* (Kiel 1923).

²⁴ I am aware that Mennonites are only one part of Anabaptism, and that there are many sources. But I am referring to the "family resemblances" of these various streams as set out by Karl Koop (Koop 2020).

his expanded definition of “familiar” affection to include “genital” relationships. And I believe Yoder was wrong in prioritizing singleness over the Jewish model of emphasis on the goodness of marriage, family, and children. We need to find new ways of thinking and acting out of our sexuality in a Christian context, avoiding the dualism of body and spirit, and the ascetic disdain of “the flesh.” We need to celebrate an ecstasy of unity, including unity with the transcendent.

We need a non-dualistic respect for the body, and a re-eroticization of our lives. George Leonard gives a positive and moral view of what familiar affection and the eroticization of the world might look like. Franz von Baader grounds his idea of Christian eroticism in an original androgyny.

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