

## An Atheist Minister?

Forcing God Out of Churches

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Given 05-Jan-19; Sermon #1468c

Just for kicks, what would you say is the first qualification for a Christian minister? Would it not be that he believes in God? I would think so. And following closely after that he believes the Bible is God's authoritative Word, containing His instructions for how we are to live. All that sounds reasonable to me.

But not everybody among the churches of this world agree with us on this. In early November 2018, the United Church of Canada—by their own admission, one of the most theologically liberal/progressive churches in the world—decided that one of its ministers, a woman by the name of Gretta Vosper, could maintain her credentials and keep her job at West Hill United Church in Toronto despite her avowed atheism.

It took the United Church of Canada about 17 years to come to this conclusion after she “came out”—that is the term these days—as an atheist in 2001. When she did that, she said that she did not “believe in a supernatural, interventionist, divine being.” This really tells you a lot; she does not want a god that will intervene in *her* life, for good or ill. She wants to be in control, I think.

But seventeen years! Why did it take them so long? She was tolerated without censure until 2015—that's 14 years—when two things occurred:

1) The United Church of Canada changed its policy to require its clergy to affirm the church's creed—probably something like the Nicene Creed—which Vosper calls “an archaic, doctrinal statement that describes God in a way that is incomprehensible and no longer has meaning for me or many within the United Church”;

2) Following the 2015 Charlie Hebdo massacre in Paris, perpetrated by radical Islamists, Vosper wrote an open letter to the church's spiritual leader (I don't know who that was at the time) , declaring that belief in God can motivate bad things. One must assume that she meant *not* believing is preferable. Now, has *not* believing motivated bad things? It doesn't seem very logical to me.

From that point on, Vosper was under disciplinary review, though still allowed to maintain her position at West Hill United Church. In September 2016, though found “unsuitable for ministry” by a Ministry Personnel Review Panel, she continued to retain her position. The church conference requested that she be stripped of her credentials

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and removed from ministry. A “heresy trial” was scheduled for late November 2018 to make a final judgment about her fitness for continuing as a minister of the United Church of Canada.

And then something happened. The United Church of Canada’s top brass changed. In July 2018, the Right Rev. Richard Bott was elected to lead the denomination from that point. A few months later, during a confidential meeting with the leaders of the denomination, Vosper and the United Church of Canada arrived at an undisclosed settlement, the upshot of which is that she can remain a credentialed and qualified minister and keep her job at West Hill. Bott said in a public statement that he is happy with the resolution, while ironically and contradictorily referring to the church’s core values of faith in God and inclusiveness.

Certainly, the United Church of Canada is an ultra-liberal denomination, but what has sustained Vosper in her pulpit all these years has been the leadership and core membership of those at West Hill United Church. The chairman of West Hill’s board Randy Bowes, claims that she—in all her atheism and all her unbelief—represents what the church is all about. Here is a quote from him: “West Hill’s non-exclusive language provides a church experience that draws participants across a wide spectrum of belief and unbelief.” Apparently Vosper—the minister—represents all those who come in on the one end of the spectrum of unbelief.

Perhaps Vosper’s Twitter description better describes what she represents: “Irritating the church into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” That is her personality; she is an irritant, and she is proud of it. Her reply when asked about this Twitter description was: “[I’m] doing a pretty good job, don’t you think?” She went on to say that she took this path because the United Church of Canada was not moving fast enough on its evolutionary and progressive path toward dumping God and His Word. “Dumping God and His Word” is the way I put it, but she said exactly that. By the way, she credits the United Church of Canada’s seminary that she attended for teaching and grounding her in her liberal atheistic views. She said that they never told her God doesn’t exist, but the way they taught made it apparent that He didn’t. She went on to describe how they approached everything from a humanistic point of view.

West Hill’s congregants love her and would have likely fought the denomination or left the denomination if her credentials had been revoked. They knew even before 2001 (when she came out as an atheist) that she did not believe the Bible was “the authoritative word of God for all time,” a conviction she had held long before her ordination—and evidently that same disbelief in God’s Word is common among United Church of Canada clergy. West Hill members were the ones she told first when she

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decided to declare her atheism, and while some did actually leave the church after she said that back in 2001, many stayed and applauded her for her courage and forthrightness.

So, you might think, they are supposedly a "Christian" church, so what do they do at West Hill United Church services? I mean, if you take God out of the equation, there is no worship. So what do they do? According to the *Toronto Star*, "Prayer turned into community sharing time. Hymns were rewritten [to remove God and Jesus Christ from them]. Talk of God and Jesus was replaced with talk of love, compassion and beauty.' Clearly, God and God's Word have been all but removed. In a sermon—I guess you might call it a sermon; a pep talk? Who knows!—Vosper will refer to a biblical example just to get a point across, and what has replaced the Bible and the teaching of the Bible is progressive and leftist ideology: a lot of tolerance, inclusiveness, openness to everything LGBTQ (and all the other parts of the alphabet that they put on there), and community idealism. In fact, she says that, to her, the long-term goal of the church is to create healthy, engaged communities in the here and now.

In a CBC News interview, Vosper said, "God as the source of goodness and as the way that goodness comes into the world and as the promise that everything is going to be good whether in this lifetime or in the afterlife, that God doesn't exist anymore. We have to recognize that we are the only way goodness is going to get into this world. And we define what's good, . . . so we are the creators of good."

She doesn't know what she is talking about. There is no good without God.

This is the direction of the mainline, so-called Christian churches—toward hollow, humanistic, communitarian social organizations, carrying on as "churches" but really preaching liberal social and political ideology to biblically ignorant people. So, Paul in Romans 3:18 can write, quoting Psalm 36:1, "There is no fear of God before their eyes.' Having sown the wind, they—and we—had better prepare to reap the whirlwind.