

An Open Letter to Gretta Vosper in Response to Her Open Letter to The Rev. Gary Paterson, Moderator of the United Church of Canada.

If Ms. Vosper's ideas weren't so dangerous, it would be tempting to read her letter with quiet amazement at her naiveté and click on the next Internet prophet with celebrity to be sought and a book to be sold. Ah, the sweet bliss of continuing to believe in an 18<sup>th</sup> Century ideology that the path to world peace lies in a single solution: get rid of religion.

Evidence that this ideology is false and dangerous can be seen in the bloody aftermath of its first proclamation in France's Revolution: The Reign of Terror. Unfortunately this was only the beginning of non-religious ideological war, genocide and mass starvations. Hitler, Mussolini, Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, Amin. Mugabe, and too many others have caused far more death and destruction than the current terror that we mis-attribute solely to religion.

Ms. Vosper also says that we should all stop believing in ideas about God that almost no one in the United Church actually believes anyway. So I'm puzzled as to how we can respond to her demand. Ms. Vosper seems to make the mistake of assuming that her ideas about God are identical with the actual reality of God. Therefore, if her ideas about God are juvenile and unbelievable, then God must be an infantile fantasy that we must learn to outgrow.

But she overlooks the glaringly obvious alternative that while it is true that her ideas about God are juvenile, there are centuries of conversations about the reality of God that provide mature, rich and nuanced experiences and expressions of God. I am happy to belong to the God believing United Church precisely because it is a home to these conversations.

And while I appreciate Ms. Vosper's call for the United Church to act with greater clarity and integrity based on its core convictions, I can't help but wonder what sort of example she herself is setting. Perhaps she uses the rationale of being a provocateur from within the institution, but wouldn't her personal integrity be far more clearly demonstrated by admitting she is no longer in accordance with the church's understanding of her ordination vows. And take the steps to leave the United Church? As things stand right now, I feel a bit like someone who has covenanted with a partner "to be faithful to you alone," who insists that they are still honouring the covenant while having affairs. It's just that I need to open my understanding of what that covenant means. Hmm. Well, let's have that conversation after we have terminated the original covenant. (And just so you know ahead of time, I'm not really interested in your idea of what "faithful" means.)

I hope Ms. Vosper's book sells well. I also hope she ceases promoting it by speaking so dangerously.

David Ewart.