

ONTARIO
JUDICIAL COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL
(The United Church of Canada)

B E T W E E N:

REVEREND GRETTA VOSPER

Appellant

-and-

THE GENERAL SECRETARY of the GENERAL COUNCIL

Respondent

STATEMENT OF ARGUMENT

(Pursuant to Section 13.7.6 of The United Church of Canada's Appeals Resource, August 2013)

September 18, 2015

Falconers LLP

Barristers-at-law
10 Alcorn Ave., Suite 204
Toronto, Ontario
M4V 3A9

Julian N. Falconer (L.S.U.C No. 29465R)
Akosua Matthews (L.S.U.C. No. 65621V)

Tel: (416) 964-0495
Fax: (416) 929-8179

Lawyers for the Reverend Gretta Vosper

TO:

Cavaluzzo Shilton McIntyre Cornish LLP

474 Bathurst Street, Suite 300

Toronto, Ontario

M5T 2S6

Elizabeth J. McIntyre

Tel: (416) 964-1115

Fax: (416) 964-5895

Lawyer for the General Secretary of General Council
of the United Church of Canada, Nora Sanders

AND TO:

The United Church of Canada

3250 Bloor Street West, Suite 300

Toronto, Ontario

M8X 2Y4

Tel: (416) 231-5931

Fax: (416) 231-3103

Kathy McDonald

Cynthia Gunn

Legal/Judicial Counsel for the United Church of Canada

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| PART I – STATEMENT OF FACTS..... | 5 |
| Overview..... | 5 |
| Background of the Appellant..... | 6 |
| Procedural Background..... | 7 |
| PART II – GROUNDS OF APPEAL..... | 9 |
| PART III – STATEMENT OF ARGUMENT..... | 10 |
| I. THE RULING OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY WAS NOT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE POLITY OF THE UNITED CHURCH..... | 10 |
| (A) The General Secretary exceeded her authority pursuant to s. E.4.2.3(f) of <i>The Manual</i> by ruling on substantive matters beyond “questions about the polity, procedures, and practice of the United Church”..... | 11 |
| (B) The General Secretary exceeded her authority by unilaterally redefining the Church’s understanding of ministry, contrary to s. 8.6.2(1)(a)(iii) of <i>The Manual</i> , without engaging in a category 3 remit as required by s. F.2.1.3(c) | 12 |
| The General Secretary’s Ruling..... | 12 |
| The Power to Redefine the Church’s Understanding of Ministry | 13 |
| The Church’s Current Understanding of ‘Ministry’ | 15 |
| The General Secretary’s Ruling Redefines Ministry | 19 |
| Impact of Redefining Understanding of Ministry..... | 23 |
| (C) The General Secretary’s ruling failed to substantively consider the UCC’s own best practices guides with respect to review processes and the principles of natural justice..... | 24 |
| II. THE DECISION WAS NOT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE RULES OF NATURAL JUSTICE | 25 |
| (A) The General Secretary’s ruling exceeds her jurisdiction and fails to follow the United Church of Canada’s substantive and procedural rules..... | 26 |
| (B) The Appellant and her congregation were denied the opportunity to make representations prior to the General Secretary’s ruling | 27 |
| (C) The General Secretary’s ruling exhibited a reasonable apprehension of bias..... | 28 |
| The General Secretary answered a biased question..... | 29 |
| The General Secretary answered a question she had not been asked | 29 |
| The General Secretary failed to consider alternative means of resolution | 30 |
| Appearance of bad faith..... | 30 |
| III. THE COURT THAT MADE THE DECISION FAILED TO CONSIDER THE MATTER AS COMPLETELY AS PRACTICABLE | 31 |
| IV. THE DECISION WAS NOT REASONABLE BASED ON THE EVIDENCE | 32 |

| | |
|---|----|
| V. THERE IS EVIDENCE AVAILABLE THAT COULD NOT HAVE BEEN PRODUCED EARLIER AND THAT MAY BE RELEVANT | 33 |
| PART IV – COSTS..... | 35 |
| PART V – ORDER SOUGHT..... | 37 |
| SCHEDULE “A” – AUTHORITIES..... | 38 |
| SCHEDULE “B” – UCC POLITY PROVISIONS | 39 |
| SCHEDULE “C” – ADDITIONAL REFERENCE MATERIALS..... | 50 |
| SCHEDULE “D” - CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP IN SUPPORT OF THOUGHT AND PRACTICE AT WEST HILL UNITED CHURCH (WHUC) and WHUC FAITH STATEMENTS..... | 58 |

PART I – STATEMENT OF FACTS

Overview

1. This case is about asking the wrong question and therefore getting the wrong answer. The subject of this appeal is a ruling by the General Secretary of the General Council that, with respect, was ultimately based on a leading question. The question of how to deal with concerns surrounding an ordered minister directed the attention of the General Secretary to the ordination questions and thus begged its own answer. In answering the question, the General Secretary changed the substantive understanding of ministry in the United Church of Canada (“UCC”) while purporting to rule only with respect to “polity, procedures, and practice”.

2. The real question that should have been asked at the outset is, “What to do about Gretta? How does ministry that does not rely on a theistic God fit within the core beliefs of the UCC?” If that question had been asked openly, issues of interpretation with respect to polity and procedure could have been resolved in the context of a frank and broad-based inquiry into the core beliefs of a modern United Church. By not asking the honest question of “what to do about Gretta,” and by extension, “should we redefine ministry”, the UCC shortchanges itself.

3. The UCC long ago recognized that it was important to follow its own rules. *The Manual* and the other written guidelines of the UCC provide clarity with respect to the administration of the Church in accordance with its members’ beliefs. The UCC has rules for determining the formal definition of ministry, and they require the democratic support of a majority of the presbyteries across Canada. A category 3 remit is a long and difficult process. It may be the case that the question of “what to do about Gretta” requires significant inquiry, reflection, and debate to resolve. However, there are no shortcuts. This appeal concerns errors and missteps that inevitably occurred in pursuing shortcuts at the expense of deeper understanding.

Background of the Appellant

4. The Reverend Gretta Vosper (“the Appellant”) has been a minister at West Hill United Church (“WHUC”) for 18 years. In 2001, the Appellant was inspired to give a spontaneously preached sermon wherein she deconstructed the traditional theological conception of God.
5. Although the Appellant did not begin to use the term ‘atheist’ until 2013, in the spirit of transparency, she made it clear to her congregation in 2001 that she did not find it necessary to believe in a supernatural, interventionist, divine being in order to faithfully apply and benefit from the traditions and teachings of the UCC.
6. The WHUC congregation supported the Appellant immediately and continues to support her to this day. The WHUC congregation chose to continue to walk the path of innovation and diversity that has characterized the UCC since it was formed from the merger of the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational Churches of Canada by congregants seeking wider fellowship and inclusivity nearly 100 years ago.
7. The Appellant adopted the label “atheist” in 2013 as an expression of solidarity with people around the world who were being persecuted and murdered for challenging religious fundamentalism and extremism. The Appellant’s beliefs, and the application of her beliefs to her ministry, have long been a matter of public record. The Appellant has published two books that describe her understanding of God and argue for the importance of UCC teachings regardless of any belief in a theistic, supernatural being.
8. What is ultimately at stake for the Appellant is not only her career, but also the fulfillment of a calling that she believes in deeply. What is at stake for her congregation is equally significant: the ability to practice their faith in a mutually supportive community as part of a church that they believe in. And what is at stake for the UCC itself includes not only the integrity of its polity, but also the vindication of its traditional inclusiveness in a society that continues to become more and more diverse.
9. The Appellant is pursuing this Appeal not only to defend her calling and the WHUC congregation’s home within the UCC, but also to protect other clergy from being arbitrarily

subjected to drastic review processes simply for engaging in innovative forms of ministry. The Appellant believes in protecting a space for clergy and members of the UCC to continue to challenge and exchange ideas freely, without fear or repercussion.

Procedural Background

10. On May 11, 2015, an order for the review of the Appellant's "effectiveness" was passed by the Sub-Executive of Toronto Conference. That order for a review culminated from a series of procedural and non-procedural steps, which we outline at length in the following paragraphs.

11. On April 15, 2015, the Executive of the Toronto Conference adopted a motion by Lawrence Nyarko and Marg Smith to:

"request the General Secretary of General Council to outline a process for considering concerns that have been raised regarding the on-going status of an ordered minister, with a focus on continuing affirmation of the questions asked of all candidates at the time of ordination, commissioning or admission in basis of Union 11.3".

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive of Toronto Conference, Wednesday, April 15, 2015, Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Exhibit B

12. In response to the above request, the General Secretary of the General Council, Nora Sanders, issued a ruling on May 5, 2015. The ruling began by recognizing that if the concerns raised about an ordered minister raise a question about "effectiveness", a review may be ordered pursuant to s. J.9.3 of *The Manual*. The General Secretary immediately focused on the questions of ordination, as directed by the motion of the Toronto Conference. The General Secretary ruled that a minister must be suitable for ministry as measured by the questions of ordination in order to be deemed effective in a review under s. J.9.3. After reaching that conclusion, the minister went on to set out a process for a formal review of an ordered minister.

Ruling of the General Secretary of General Council, Nora Saunders, titled 'Re: Process for addressing theological concerns re: ordered Minister', dated May 5, 2015 [the General Secretary's Ruling], Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Exhibit, C

13. Guided by the General Secretary's ruling, on May 11, 2015 the Executive of the Toronto Conference adopted the following motion by Ann Harbridge and Linda Parsons:

“that in accordance with *Manual* Section J.9.3, the sub-Executive of Toronto Conference order a review of effectiveness of the Rev. Gretta Vosper; and

the sub-Executive direct the Conference’s Interview Committee to undertake the review of the Rev. Gretta Vosper, interviewing her with a focus on continuing affirmation of the questions asked of all candidates at the time of ordination, commissioning or admission in Basis of Union 11.3; and

that the Conference’s Interview Committee report to the Conference’s sub-Executive by June 25, 2015.

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive of Toronto Conference, Monday, May 11, 2015 [the “Order for Review”], Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Exhibit D

14. On June 1, 2015, the Appellant, through Counsel, submitted a written request to Rev. Bryan Ransom, President of the Sub-Executive of the Toronto Conference, requesting a suspension of the order for review, pending this appeal.

Correspondence from Julian Falconer to Rev. Bryan Ransom, June 1, 2015, Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Exhibit E

15. On June 4, 2015, the Appellant submitted a Notice of Appeal of the General Secretary’s Ruling.

Notice of Appeal of Ruling of General Secretary of General Council, submitted June 4, 2015, Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Exhibit F

16. On June 9, 2015, Rev. David Allen confirmed, via written correspondence, that the sub-Executive of Toronto Conference had suspended the review of Rev. Gretta Vosper, pending the outcome of this appeal.

“...that the sub-Executive of Toronto Conference **suspend** the review of Rev. Gretta Vosper pending the outcome of the appeal of the Ruling of the General Secretary of General Council that laid out the review process to be followed.”

The letter further confirmed that the proposed June 18, 2015 interview date would not take place.

Correspondence from Rev. David Allen to Julian Falconer, June 9, 2015 [Emphasis Added], Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Exhibit G

Minutes of a meeting of the Sub-Executive of Toronto Conference, June 9, 2015, Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Exhibit H

17. On June 11, 2015, the Appellant filed an Appeal of the sub-Executive of Toronto Conference’s May 11, 2015 order for review.

Notice of Appeal of Sub-Executive of Toronto Conference's Order for Review, submitted June 11, 2015, Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Exhibit I

18. The Appellant submits the following statement of argument in respect of an appeal of the General Secretary's May 5, 2015 ruling.
19. The Appellant has separately submitted a *pro forma* statement of argument in respect of the appeal of the sub-Executive of Toronto Conference order for a review. In that statement of argument, the Appellant argues: firstly, that the suspension of the order for a review renders a statement of argument moot; and, secondly, in the alternative, that the order for a review depends entirely on the outcome of the appeal of the General Secretary's ruling and that a substantive statement of argument at this point in time is thereby premature.

PART II – GROUNDS OF APPEAL

20. An appeal of a ruling by the General Council must be made on *one or more* of the following grounds:
 - i. The decision maker failed to consider the matter as completely as practicable;
 - ii. The decision was not in accordance with the rules of natural justice;
 - iii. The decision was not reasonable based on the evidence;
 - iv. The decision was not in accordance with the polity of the United Church; or
 - v. There is evidence available that could not have been produced earlier and that may be relevant.

See: The Manual, Section 13.6 'Grounds for Appeal', Page 204.

21. In the Statement of Argument, the Appellant must outline the arguments to be made regarding the above grounds of appeal. An Appeal Committee is struck and given the responsibility of deciding whether or not to hear the appeal.

See: Appeals (August 2013), Page 19

22. The *Appeals* guidelines provide that the Appellant simply needs to raise an arguable issue with respect to any one of the enumerated grounds in order to trigger a hearing of the appeal:

If one or more of the grounds are met, the Appeal Committee **will** make a decision to proceed to hear the appeal. If not, the Appeal Committee will make a decision to refuse to hear the appeal.

See: Appeals (August 2013), Page 19 [emphasis added]

23. The Appellant does not need to demonstrate that she is *likely* to win the appeal on a balance of probabilities. Indeed, the Appeal Committee does not need to make any inquiry at all into whether the Appellant would actually win the appeal. The Appellant respectfully submits that if she raises an arguable, non-trivial issue with respect to any of the five potential grounds then it would be improper and unjust to refuse to hear the appeal.
24. The Appellant submits that the General Secretary's ruling is appealable on all five grounds of appeal. We organize our arguments under each ground of appeal below.

PART III – STATEMENT OF ARGUMENT

I. THE RULING OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY WAS NOT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE POLITY OF THE UNITED CHURCH

25. The polity of the United Church of Canada includes all the policies and procedures for accountability, organizational structure, and decision-making that are followed in the Church, as set out in *The Manual* and associated Church documents. Any decision made by the United Church of Canada must be in accordance with *The Manual*.

See: The Manual, ibid, C.3.1.1, Page 78

See: Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel, Definition of 'polity', Page 10.

26. The General Secretary's ruling contravenes the polity of the United Church in three ways:
 - i. The General Secretary exceeded her authority pursuant to s. E.4.2.3(f) of *The Manual* by ruling on substantive matters rather than "questions about the polity, procedures, and practices of the United Church";
 - ii. The General Secretary exceeded her authority by unilaterally redefining the Church's understanding of ministry, contrary to s. 8.6.2(1)(a)(iii) of *The Manual*, without engaging in a category 3 remit as required by s. F.2.1.3(c); and

- iii. The General Secretary's ruling failed to substantively consider the UCC's own best practices guides with respect to review processes and the principles of natural justice.

(A) The General Secretary exceeded her authority pursuant to s. E.4.2.3(f) of *The Manual* by ruling on substantive matters beyond “questions about the polity, procedures, and practice of the United Church”

- 27. The motion passed by the Executive of Toronto Conference asked the General Secretary to “outline a process for considering concerns that have been raised regarding the on-going status of an ordered minister, with a focus on the continuing affirmation of the questions asked of all candidates at the time of ordination, commissioning or admission in basis of Union 11.3”.

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive of Toronto Conference, Wednesday, April 15, 2015, Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Exhibit B

- 28. In answering that question, the General Secretary relied on her powers pursuant to s. E.4.2.3(f) of *The Manual*:

4.2.3 Responsibilities

The General Secretary is responsible for

....

(f) ruling on questions about the polity, procedures, and practice of the United Church;

...

See: The Manual, ibid, S. E.4.2.3(f), Page 107

- 29. The Appellant respectfully submits that the General Secretary only had the authority to address part of the Toronto Conference's motion. The request to “outline a process for considering concerns that have been raised regarding the on-going status of an ordered minister” was a legitimate procedural question consistent with the General Secretary's powers under S. E.4.2.3(f). Her authority with respect to “polity, procedures, and practice” allows the General Secretary to address a gap in *The Manual*, which provides the presbytery with the authority to order a review, but does not outline a process under which it is to be conducted.

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive of Toronto Conference, Wednesday, April 15, 2015, Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Exhibit B

30. However, the Appellant submits that the direction to focus on “the continuing affirmation of the questions asked of all candidates at the time of ordination” was not an appropriate request with respect to “a process for considering concerns that have been raised regarding the on-going status of an ordered minister”. The General Secretary should have declined to rule on that substantive issue. Proceeding to address the questions of ordination as a focus for a process of review led the General Secretary to rule on substantive questions of Church doctrine that exceeded the limits of her powers under s. E.4.2.3(f).
- (B) The General Secretary exceeded her authority by unilaterally redefining the Church’s understanding of ministry, contrary to s. 8.6.2(1)(a)(iii) of *The Manual*, without engaging in a category 3 remit as required by s. F.2.1.3(c)**

The General Secretary’s Ruling

31. The General Secretary began her ruling as follows:

Section J.9.2 [page 194] provides that the presbytery is responsible for the oversight of ministry personnel. It requires the presbytery to take seriously any concerns that come to its attention about ministry personnel, including those raised by the presbytery itself. If the concerns raise a question about the minister's effectiveness or recognition of the authority of the presbytery, a review may be ordered.

The General Secretary’s Ruling, ibid, page 2, Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Exhibit C

32. It is notable that the motion of the Toronto Conference did not request a narrow review process, but rather a general process for addressing concerns about an ordered minister. Nevertheless, the General Secretary proceeded directly to reviewing the procedural rules for a review as set out in s. J.9.3, without considering any mechanisms for addressing concerns about a minister other than a review. The General Secretary observed that it “is clear that there is flexibility in the process for a review of a minister's “effectiveness”, and that the only mandatory aspect of it is to comply with the secular legal requirement of procedural fairness.”

The General Secretary’s Ruling, ibid, page 2, Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Exhibit C

33. The General Secretary then turned her mind to the questions of ordination in Basis of Union 11.3, as directed by the motion from the Toronto Conference. She stated that they relate to belief in God, call to ministry, and the exercise of ministry within the faith of the Church and that the answers go to the suitability of the person to serve in ministry in the UCC.
34. The General Secretary proceeded to make the following substantive ruling:

In my opinion, a person who is not suitable for ministry in the United Church cannot be "effective" as United Church ministry personnel. Where a question has been raised about the minister's suitability, the presbytery may consider that a question has been raised about "effectiveness" so as to initiate a review of the minister on that ground. The questions set out in Basis 11.3, which are asked at the time of ordering, are appropriate for assessing on-going suitability.

The General Secretary's Ruling, ibid, page 2, Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Exhibit C

35. Following this substantive ruling, the General Secretary set out a process for a formal review of an ordered minister. However, the Appellant respectfully submits that the General Secretary's ruling went further than simply answering a question about the "polity, procedures, and practice of the United Church of Canada". As argued below, her ruling unilaterally redefined the Church's understanding of ministry without any consultation with the presbyteries.

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive of Toronto Conference, Wednesday, April 15, 2015, Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Exhibit B

36. Prior to discussing the effect of the General Secretary's ruling on the Church's understanding of ministry, we first set out the applicable rules from *The Manual*. We then analyze the United Church of Canada's understanding of ministry prior to the General Secretary's ruling and discuss the substantive effects of the ruling.

The Power to Redefine the Church's Understanding of Ministry

37. The power to redefine the Church's understanding of ministry is listed as an *exception* to the powers of General Council.

8.6 The General Council shall have full power:

...

8.6.2 (1) to legislate on matters respecting the doctrine, worship, membership, and government of the Church, **subject to the following conditions:**

(a) First, that before any rule or law relative to these matters can become a permanent law, it must receive the approval of a majority of the Presbyteries, and, if advisable, Pastoral Charges also. It shall be considered advisable to obtain the approval of a majority of Pastoral Charges also only if the General Council has determined that the proposed rule or law involves a substantive change that, in the opinion of the General Council: (2007)

...

iii. redefines the Church's understanding of ministry; (2007)

See: The Manual, Ibid, at page 36-37 [Emphasis Added]

38. Any rule or law that redefines the Church's understanding of ministry must be approved through a remit. In this case, a Category 3 remit would apply.

2. Remits

The General Council may change the Basis of Union only if the change is approved through a remit. A "remit" is a vote by presbyteries or by presbyteries and pastoral charges to change the Basis of Union.

.....

2.1 Categories of Remits

There are three categories of remits.

....

2.1.3 Category 3 Remits

Category 3 remits are for substantive changes to the Basis of Union that affect denominational identity, including

- (a) altering the nature of the courts;
- (b) significantly changing the structures of the church;
- (c) redefining the church's understanding of ministry;**
- (d) affecting the articles of faith, except for gender language applied to human beings;
- (e) changing the baptismal formula or vows made upon commissioning or ordination;
- (f) moving a section from the Basis of Union to the bylaws; or
- (g) changing the church's understanding of membership.

See: The Manual, Ibid, at page 125 [Emphasis Added].

39. No decision that redefines the Church's understanding of ministry can be made unilaterally. *The Manual* is clear that such a significant question of polity requires the engagement of the wider Church community.

The Church's Current Understanding of 'Ministry'

40. In order to understand how the General Secretary's ruling redefines the Church's understanding of ministry, we first review the Church's current understanding of ministry. In particular, the terms "effectiveness" and "suitability" occupy a central role in the General Secretary's ruling.

No Definition of "Ministry"

41. The term "ministry" is not a defined concept within *The Manual*; however, it is clear that references to "ministry" describe it as a calling. The Basis of Union contains the following excerpts on "ministry".

2.3.17 Article XVII. Of the Ministry. We believe that Jesus Christ, as the Supreme Head of the Church, has appointed therein an ordained ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Pastoral Care and a diaconal ministry of Education, Service, and Pastoral Care, and calls men and women to these ministries; and that the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, recognizes and chooses those whom He calls, and should thereupon duly ordain or commission them to the work of the ministry. (The Manual, page 14)

2.4.8 VIII. The Ministry

We believe that God has appointed a Ministry in His Church for the preaching of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments, and the pastoral care of the people.

We believe that the Church has authority to ordain to the Ministry by prayer and the laying on of hands those whom she finds, after due trial, to be called of God thereto.

We believe that, for the due ordering of her life as a society, God has appointed a government in His Church, to be exercised, under Christ the head, by Ministers and representatives of the people. So we acknowledge the Holy Ministry appointed by God for the spread of the Gospel and the edification of His Church. (The Manual, pages 17-18)

See: The Manual, ibid, at pages 14, 17, 18.

See: Statement on Ministry in The United Church of Canada (2012)

42. In addition to ministry being described as a calling, the “Statement on Ministry in the United Church of Canada” describes “ministry” as a flexible concept that is open to renewal and open to new expressions of ministry to better serve the needs of the present day.

See: Statement on Ministry in The United Church of Canada (2012), at page 4

No Definition of “Effectiveness”

43. The term “effectiveness” is not defined within *The Manual*. Aside from section J.9.3 which lists “effectiveness” as a ground for review of a minister, there is only one reference to the evaluation of a minister’s “effectiveness”. This is with respect to the evaluation of an interim minister after each period of interim ministry. The Interim Ministry resource guide does not provide any substantive description of what the United Church of Canada means by the term “effectiveness”. *The Manual* does not identify a standard for assessing “effectiveness”.

See: The Manual, ibid, at page 171, Section I.1.7.6 ‘Evaluation’.

See: Interim Ministry: Policy and Procedures Handbook, April 2012.

No Definition of “Suitability” re Ordained UCC Ministers

44. *The Manual* describes “suitability” as a condition that is appraised through a process of discernment, wherein an individual is assessed on their call to ministry, personal character, motives, and faith. Another substantive reference to the term involves a requirement that a minister obtain police records checks on an ongoing basis, in order to remain suitable.

See: The Manual, ibid, at page 150, Section H.3.2.1 ‘Policy’,

See: The Manual, ibid, at page 190, Section J.2 ‘Police Records Checks’.

45. “Suitability” is also raised in respect of a process to accept a minister from another denomination. A minister from another denomination is deemed suitable for admission to the United Church of Canada if:

(a) they have an understanding of the ethos, polity, and history of the United Church that they have acquired through education;

(b) they are in essential agreement with the doctrine of the United Church as stated in the Basis of Union; and

(c) they agree to comply with the polity of the United Church.

See: The Manual, ibid, at page 158, Section H.8.3.2 'Readiness and Suitability for Admission'.

46. For an already ordained minister, “suitability” is not used as a term of assessment in *The Manual*, aside from the provision for ongoing police record checks.

Expectations of a UCC Minister

47. None of the above references on the concepts of “ministry”, “effectiveness”, or “suitability” assist us with understanding what is expected of a United Church minister. It is clear that there is no single, binding understanding of ministry within *The Manual* or other Church documents.

48. The *Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice* is the most substantive discussion of expectations of a minister within UCC polity. *The Manual* describes this policy as a tool that may be used as a resource in any informal or formal process that involves ministry personnel; however, it is neither binding nor determinative on its own of a minister’s “effectiveness”.

See: The Manual, Ibid, J.5 Principles of Conflict Resolution, Page 191

49. During the 38th General Council (2003), a task group on the Exercise of Discipline of Ministry was charged with the responsibility of developing standards of practice and ethical standards for ministry personnel. Further, the task group was responsible for evaluating existing practices through which ministry personnel are held accountable. This exercise was a first step towards the development of a broader policy of discipline for ministry personnel. The 39th General Council (2006) approved standards of practice and ethical standards for ministry personnel.

See: “Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice” ibid, at pages 1- 2.

50. According to the “Congregational Designated Ministers, August 2013” resource, the *Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice* is the policy that defines “effectiveness” for both congregational designated ministers and ministry personnel; however, *The Manual*

does not state that the *Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice* policy is *the* standard for determining “effectiveness”. *The Manual* describes the *Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice* policy as a resource that *may* be used in any informal or formal process that involves ministry personnel.

See: Congregational Designated Ministers (August 2013), Page 4

See: The Manual, pages 191

51. The ethical standards are described as a framework to enable ministry personnel to be accountable to self, Church and community. The policy indicates that these ethical standards are to highlight a positive *expectation* rather than mandate a *prohibition*.

See: “Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice” ibid, at page 2.

52. The standards of practice describe standards to which ministry personnel aspire, in recognition that ministry personnel will evolve personally and professionally through their careers, which will impact their practice of ministry. Critically, ministry personnel are expected to know, understand and be responsible to the particular context in which they serve, paying attention to the spiritual needs and local traditions of faith and worship. The standards do not serve as performance measurements; rather they are aspirational descriptions of practice.

See: “Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice” ibid, at page 2.

53. The *Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice* are a flexible, contextual tool; however, they are not to be interpreted as proscriptive. Further the standards are not listed in any particular order or sequence of priority. No one standard is given more weight or merit than any other. The standards acknowledge that the order and weight given to each standard are contextual to the particular pastoral charge or appointment.

See: “Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice” ibid, at page 3 & 6.

54. The ongoing affirmation of the questions of ordination is not listed as a measure of ministry, or standard on which to hold a minister accountable within the United Church of Canada’s *Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice*.

The General Secretary's Ruling Redefines Ministry

55. As set out above, the Church's understanding of ministry prior to the General Secretary's ruling is as follows:

- i. "Effectiveness" is not a defined term, but is broadly understood under the *Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice* policy;
- ii. There is no standard set out in UCC polity for determining "effectiveness";
- iii. "Suitability" is not a precisely defined term and it is not a term that is used in reference to ordained ministers; and,
- iv. There is no defined standard for assessing the "suitability" of an ordained minister.

56. The critical paragraph of the General Secretary's ruling with respect to the Church's understanding of ministry is the following:

In my opinion, a person who is not suitable for ministry in the United Church cannot be "effective" as United Church ministry personnel. Where a question has been raised about the minister's suitability, the presbytery may consider that a question has been raised about "effectiveness" so as to initiate a review of the minister on that ground.

The Ruling, Page 2 [Emphasis Added], Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Exhibit C

57. The Appellant submits that the General Secretary's ruling redefined the Church's understanding of ministry in four ways:

- i. The General Secretary has created new definitions for the terms "effectiveness" and "suitability";
- ii. The General Secretary has redefined the standards of "effectiveness" and "suitability", rendering "suitability" determinative of a minister's "effectiveness";
- iii. The General Secretary has created a new ground for ordering a review of ministers;
- iv. The General Secretary has omitted the role of "essential agreement".

58. The Appellant respectfully submits that the above four changes individually and collectively redefine the Church's understanding of ministry and require a Category 3 remit to be validly implemented.

New Definitions for "Effectiveness" and "Suitability"

59. As described above, neither "effectiveness" nor "suitability" is defined within *The Manual*. However, the General Secretary baldly defined "effectiveness" to mean "suitability". This redefined both terms such that a question about "suitability" raises a question about "effectiveness". With respect, the General Secretary has presumed or invented a definition of the terms "effectiveness" and "suitability" that did not previously exist.
60. The absence of any pre-existing basis for the definitions is highlighted by the fact that the General Secretary pronounced that "effectiveness" requires "suitability" as a matter of her opinion without any doctrinal support. She did not and could not have made reference to any justification for this opinion within current United Church of Canada rules, policy, or procedure.
61. Notably, neither "suitability" nor "effectiveness", or their derivatives, can be found as terms within the *Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice* policy. Additionally, "suitability" and "effectiveness" are not equated in the *Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice* policy or elsewhere in UCC polity.
62. To the extent that there was any pre-existing definition of "effectiveness", the concept has been substantially narrowed by the General Secretary's ruling. *The Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice* policy offers a considerably more expansive list of expectations for which ministers can be held accountable than simply "suitability", which is only defined in *The Manual* in relation to pre-ordained ministers. By defining "effectiveness" via 'suitability', the General Secretary has substantially narrowed and limited the current understanding of ministry and ignored a multitude of other criteria upon which a minister could be deemed "effective".

63. With respect, there is no basis within current polity, policy or procedure of the United Church of Canada to summarily presume the substantive content of these terms in a ruling about process.

The General Secretary Redefined the Standard for “Effectiveness” and “Suitability”

64. By conflating “suitability” with “effectiveness”, the General Secretary’s Ruling has re-defined how both concepts are assessed by tying the substantive standard to the questions of ordination.
65. As described above, the “suitability” of potential ministers is assessed through a process of discernment. This process is completed *prior* to forwarding an individual’s name for candidacy for ordered ministry. Only after an individual is deemed suitable can that individual proceed through a process of ordination. In short, even for new ministers, “suitability” is not determined via the questions of ordination. The questions of ordination are only asked of suitable candidates. “Suitability” and ordination are distinct and separate concepts and processes.

See: “Entering Ministry” (August 2013)

66. Because *The Manual* does not identify a substantive standard for “effectiveness”, the General Secretary’s ruling marks a significant change in how “effectiveness” is determined. To the extent that the *Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice* outlines a potential rubric upon which to assess a minister’s “effectiveness”, the General Secretary’s ruling has substantially narrowed that list down to one standard: “suitability”.
67. In limiting “effectiveness” to “suitability”, the General Secretary has also privileged “suitability” as *determinative* of a minister’s “effectiveness”. This is at odds with the *Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice* policy, in which no particular standard is determinative of a minister’s “effectiveness”, nor is there a hierarchy where any one standard is privileged over another.

See: “Entering Ministry (August 2013)”

68. There is no basis in UCC polity, practice or procedure for assessing “effectiveness” via the questions of ordination.

The General Secretary Created a New Ground for Review of Ministers

69. By shoehorning “suitability” into “effectiveness”, the General Secretary has created a brand new ground on which to review a minister. Pursuant to *The Manual*, there are only two ways in which a review of a minister may be ordered: (1) “effectiveness”; or (2) the minister’s recognition of the authority of the presbytery. As a result of the General Secretary’s ruling, a third ground has been created: “suitability”. The General Secretary has created this ground without any form of consultation and without recourse to any current rule, practice or procedure of the United Church of Canada. A potential consequence of a review is to place that subject minister on the Discontinued Service List. With the career, livelihood, and calling of a minister at stake, the creation of new grounds on which to review a minister ought to be done with far broader consensus than the unilateral opinion of the General Secretary.

See: The Manual, ibid, section J.9.3 at page 194.

The General Secretary omitted the role of “Essential Agreement”

70. In the alternative, if it was proper for the General Secretary to rule that the questions of ordination should be used in reviewing a minister’s “effectiveness”, the questions of ordination should be asked within the context of “essential agreement”. The General Secretary does not address “essential agreement” at any point in her ruling.
71. The context of “essential agreement” is *always* provided to candidates who are asked the questions of ordination. An assessment of a candidate’s “essential agreement” with the doctrine of the United Church is required of brand new ministerial candidates, candidates admitted from other denominations, and for candidates seeking readmission to ministry. It is only after a determination of a candidate’s “essential agreement” with United Church doctrine that a candidate is permitted to answer the questions of ordination.

72. The process of essential agreement permits an exploration of the candidate's doctrinal beliefs. As such, when the candidate proceeds to answering the questions of ordination, the questions are answered within the supporting context of "essential agreement":

"11.2 The Conference shall examine each Candidate on the Statement of Doctrine of the United Church and **shall, before ordination, commissioning, or admission, be satisfied that such Candidate is in essential agreement therewith**, and as a member of the Order of Ministry of the United Church accepts the statement as being **in substance agreeable to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures**." [emphasis added]

See: The Manual, Ibid, Basis of Union: The Order of Ministry, Section 11.2 at page 40.

73. The General Secretary has effectively excised the questions of ordination from the context in which the questions are asked: specifically, "essential agreement". This is a profound change to the method by which the United Church of Canada ascertains doctrinal adherence. It is the General Secretary's responsibility to protect the theological identity of the UCC. "Essential agreement" is an inextricable part of the UCC's theological identity and history. It is arguable that the union of the Congregational, the Methodist and most of the Presbyterian Churches in Canada was only possible because of the role of "essential agreement".

Impact of Redefining Understanding of Ministry

74. In summary, in the absence of a bedrock definition of the Church's understanding of ministry, the General Secretary's ruling is made much more significant by the gaping void it fills. The concepts of "suitability" and "effectiveness" are intimately connected to the Church's understanding of ministry. By changing how these terms are understood and used, the General Secretary has significantly changed two key elements of Church polity. In so doing, the General Secretary has created a brand new ground for ordering a review of ministry personnel. Further, the General Secretary has significantly narrowed the Church's current understanding of the term "effectiveness" as expounded in the *Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice* policy and in so doing, has rendered "suitability" determinative of a minister's "effectiveness". The General Secretary has further altered how "suitability" has been traditionally assessed by linking it to the questions of ordination even though "suitability" via discernment and ordination are distinct concepts and processes. Lastly, in using the questions of ordination, the General Secretary has ignored

the critical element of “essential agreement” which is assessed prior to posing the questions of ordination to a candidate.

75. All of the above is intimately connected with how the Church understands, defines and reviews a minister. The individual and cumulative effect of the General Secretary’s ruling represents a profound shift in the Church’s understanding of ministry. That it was done unilaterally and without justification to a current rule, policy or procedure is particularly concerning given that one possible result from a review is to end a minister’s calling. If the United Church of Canada wants to take such substantive steps towards redefining the Church’s understanding of ministry, the rules contemplate that such a shift would require considerably wider participation, in particular through a Category 3 remit.
76. Recently, both Hamilton and Toronto Conference submitted nearly identical proposals for consideration by the General Council 42, which took place this past August 2015. Both proposals asked the Church to re-examine the questions of ordination in light of the General Secretary’s ruling. It is clear that the General Secretary’s purportedly procedural ruling has led to significant reflection on the Church’s substantive understanding of ministry and the core beliefs of the UCC.

Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Exhibit R

- (C) **The General Secretary’s ruling failed to substantively consider the UCC’s own best practices guides with respect to review processes and the principles of natural justice**
77. The “Pastoral Charge and Ministry Personnel Reviews” resource (hereinafter the “Reviews Resource”) is the only UCC guide explicating the process for conducting personnel reviews. The only mandatory requirement is that a review be conducted in accordance with procedural fairness requirements under Canadian law. The Reviews Resource, while not mandatory, is described as a resource containing “information, guidance, and advice on the best ways to live out mandatory policies and procedures” [Emphasis added].

See: “Pastoral Charge and Ministry Personnel Reviews” (“Reviews Resource”), August 2013, at page 3

78. The Reviews Resource strongly recommends that the best practices contained within the resource be followed in order to meet the mandatory requirement of natural justice.

“it is mandatory for the presbytery, the reviewer, and all others involved in the review process to comply with the requirements of *The Manual* and of natural justice under the secular law. **The consequences of not complying with these requirements are serious: the decision resulting from the review may be overturned on appeal or by the secular courts. For this reason, the United Church legal/judicial counsel strongly recommend that these best practices be followed.**” [Emphasis added]

See: “Pastoral Charge and Ministry Personnel Reviews” at page 10

79. It is a glaring omission that the General Secretary’s ruling does not consider the “best practices” set out in the Reviews Resource. Indeed, the General Secretary did not even provide a rationale for failing to address the Reviews Resource or explain why the “best practices” it sets out are not relevant to her ruling. Given the significance of this omission, the Appellant respectfully submits that the General Secretary’s ruling cannot have fulsomely addressed the mandatory requirement for procedural fairness and natural justice under Canadian common law.

II. THE DECISION WAS NOT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE RULES OF NATURAL JUSTICE

80. Any administrative decision by the United Church of Canada that affects the substantive rights of its members must be made in accordance with the principles of procedural fairness and natural justice. Procedural fairness and natural justice are requirements under both secular law and *The Manual*.

81. The Court of Appeal for Ontario has observed that:

The civil courts are properly reluctant to interfere with the internal affairs of a church, but they will do so to ensure that a member of a church is not treated unfairly. A fortiori they ought to interfere if a member of a church is treated unlawfully.

McCaw v United Church of Canada (1991), 82 DLR (4th) 289; 1991 CarswellOnt 929 (Ont CA) (WL) [McCaw], Appellant’s Book of Authorities, Tab 1

82. Canadian common law is thus clear that the principles of natural justice are binding upon the administrators of religious organizations. Specifically, where an administrative decision or process affects property, civil, or contractual rights, it must be undertaken in good faith and affected parties have the right to reasonable notice, the right to make representations, and the right to an unbiased decision maker.

Lakeside Colony of Hutterian Brethren v Hofer, [1992] 3 SCR 165 (SCC) at paras 175 and 195 [*Hofer*] Appellant's Book of Authorities, Tab 2

83. *The Manual*, regarded by the civil courts as akin to the law of the UCC, explicitly requires Church administrators to comply with procedural fairness and natural justice in accordance with secular law. A decision or ruling that is made in bad faith or that denies natural justice to affected Church members is reviewable in Ontario by the Divisional Court.

See: The Manual, (2013) *The United Church of Canada*, Page 195, Section J.13.6 at page 204, & Section J.13.9.4(d) at page 206

Lindenburger v United Church of Canada (1985), 10 OAC 191; 1985 CarswellOnt 864 (Ont Div Ct) (WL) at para 19, Appellant's Book of Authorities, Tab 3

Davis v United Church of Canada (1991), 92 DLR (4th) 678; 1991 CarswellOnt 1076 (OCJ Gen Div) (WL) [*Davis*], Appellant's Book of Authorities, Tab 4

84. The Appellant respectfully submits that the General Secretary failed to abide by the principles of procedural fairness and natural justice in three ways:

- i. The General Secretary's ruling exceeded her jurisdiction and fails to follow the UCC's substantive and procedural rules;
- ii. The Appellant and her congregation were denied any opportunity to make representations prior to the General Secretary's ruling; and,
- iii. The General Secretary's ruling exhibited a reasonable apprehension of bias.

(A) The General Secretary's ruling exceeds her jurisdiction and fails to follow the United Church of Canada's substantive and procedural rules

85. As a component of procedural fairness and natural justice, Canadian common law requires that church tribunals follow their own substantive and procedural rules and that decision makers adhere to the jurisdiction granted to them under those rules. Failure to do so can attract judicial intervention.

Hofer, supra at paras 173-175, Appellant's Book of Authorities, Tab 2

Pal v Chatterjee, 2013 ONSC 1329 (CanLII) at paras 30-32 [*Pal*], Appellant's Book of Authorities, Tab 5

86. As set out in paragraphs above, the Appellant respectfully submits that the ruling of the General Secretary exceeded her jurisdiction by failing to follow the procedures of the UCC, as set out in *The Manual*, in at least three ways:

- i. The General Secretary exceeded her authority pursuant to s. E.4.2.3(f) of *The Manual* by ruling on substantive matters rather than “questions about the polity, procedures, and practices of the United Church”;
- ii. The General Secretary exceeded her authority by unilaterally redefining the Church’s understanding of ministry, contrary to s. 8.6.2(1)(a)(iii) of *The Manual*, without engaging in a category 3 remit as required by s. F.2.1.3(c); and
- iii. The General Secretary’s ruling failed to consider the UCC’s own best practices guides with respect to review processes and the principles of natural justice.

87. For the reasons set out above, the Appellant respectfully submits that these violations of UCC’s own procedures constitute an excess of jurisdiction and a denial of natural justice under secular law.

(B) The Appellant and her congregation were denied the opportunity to make representations prior to the General Secretary’s ruling

88. The minutes of the meeting of the Executive of the Toronto Conference make clear that its motion “to outline a process for considering concerns that have been raised regarding the on-going status of an ordered minister” was directed specifically at concerns with respect to the Appellant, who is referenced by name. The ruling requested from the General Secretary thus directly affected the livelihood and calling of the Appellant, as well as the ongoing ministry of the WHUC.

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive of Toronto Conference, Wednesday, April 15, 2015, Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Exhibit B

89. The General Secretary also acknowledged that her ruling was concerned with a process for reviewing a particular minister, stating that “[m]y prayers will be with... the ordered minister and all others involved in this matter.” Her ruling included substantive determinations that affected the Appellant’s rights, including that the Appellant could not

be considered an effective minister if she did not meet the criteria for “suitability” contained in Basis of Union 11.3.

The Ruling, Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Exhibit C

90. Nevertheless, the General Secretary did not provide the Appellant or the WHUC with a copy of the motion by the Executive of the Toronto Conference, or the opportunity to make representations on the matter, prior to making her ruling. The Appellant respectfully submits that the General Secretary’s failure to hold a fair hearing on an issue with significant consequences for her and her congregation breached the Appellant’s right to be heard pursuant to the principles of natural justice.

Davis, supra at para 31, Appellant’s Book of Authorities, Tab 4

(C) The General Secretary’s ruling exhibited a reasonable apprehension of bias

91. Under the Canadian common law, a reasonable apprehension of bias exists where a decision maker has a predisposition to decide an issue in a particular way. Importantly, there is no requirement of *actual* bias. The Supreme Court of Canada describes the test for a reasonable apprehension of bias as follows:

...the apprehension of bias must be a reasonable one, held by reasonable and right minded persons, applying themselves to the question and obtaining thereon the required information... [T]hat test is "what would an informed person, viewing the matter realistically and practically — and having thought the matter through — conclude. Would he think that it is more likely than not that [the decision-maker], whether consciously or unconsciously, would not decide fairly...

Baker v Canada (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration), [1999] 2 SCR 817 at 849-850 [*Baker*], Appellant’s Book of Authorities, Tab 6

92. There are three indicia that would cause an informed person to conclude that the General Secretary’s ruling exhibited an evident predisposition to decide the issue before her in a particular way:
- i. She answered a biased question that suggested, in part, its own answer;
 - ii. She answered a question that she had not been asked; and
 - iii. She failed to consider alternative means for resolving the matter as set out in *The Manual*.

The General Secretary answered a biased question

93. As described above, the motion by the Executive of the Toronto Conference contained two requests: (1) that the General Secretary outline a process for addressing concerns with an ordered minister; and (2) that this process focus on the questions of ordination. However, as also described above, there is no doctrinal rationale set out in *The Manual* as to whether or how the questions of ordination actually apply to concerns with an ordered minister.
94. The General Secretary's ruling began by focusing on the questions of ordination and then proceeded to describe a method of tying the questions of ordination to a review of a minister's "effectiveness". The General Secretary understood that a review could only be ordered if there was a question about a minister's "effectiveness" or recognition of the authority of the presbytery. The General Secretary's focus on the questions of ordination caused her to assume the answer to a question that actually remains open: what are the elements of "effectiveness" for the purposes of a review?
95. The General Secretary thus exhibited a predisposition to decide the question posed to her in a certain way, by focusing on the questions of ordination. Although this was at the behest of the Executive of Toronto Conference, the General Secretary was required to consider the matter in accordance with *The Manual* and should not have proceeded on the basis of a leading question. For the purposes of procedural fairness, it is irrelevant if bias entered the decision making process *before* the matter reached the final decision maker if there is a reasonable apprehension that it affected the final decision.

Baker, supra at 849, Appellant's Book of Authorities, Tab 6

The General Secretary answered a question she had not been asked

96. It is also important to examine the request made of the General Secretary for what is *not* present: the Toronto Conference did not request a process for a review. Neither the motion of the Executive of the Toronto Conference, the minutes of the meeting at which the motion was made, nor the letter raising concerns that is referenced in those minutes actually suggest that there should be a process to *review* the Appellant. The request was for a general process to address concerns raised about an ordered minister.

97. The fact that the General Secretary made an unprompted and unexplained leap from a request for a process to address concerns to setting out a process to review and potentially terminate the Appellant would lead a reasonable and informed observer to conclude that the General Secretary was predisposed to rule that way.

The General Secretary failed to consider alternative means of resolution

98. The deficiencies in the question answered by the General Secretary and the direction of her response are exacerbated by the conspicuous absence of any consideration of alternative processes that were equally available under *The Manual*.
99. *The Manual* explicitly addresses conflict that can arise because of strongly held and differing ideas and references the impact such conflict can have on the Church. The General Secretary's ruling did not address in any way the possibility of resolving the apparent conflict by way of an informal conflict resolution process.

Whenever there is a conflict between people in the body of Christ, there is pain and anxiety on all sides. Conflicts may arise because of strongly held and differing ideas, violations of rights, and our own human imperfections. When conflicts go unresolved, the body suffers wounds. The longer the body suffers, the deeper the wounds go. Conflicts also take time, energy, and other resources away from our work in mission.

Some conflicts may be preventable. There are processes in the church to address the possibility of conflict in a proactive way.

See: The Manual, supra, Page 191

100. Additionally, as noted above, the Reviews Resource also provides guidance on how to conduct a review of a minister. The General Secretary failed to substantively address this resource in her ruling. That the General Secretary did not address either informal conflict resolution or the best practices in the Reviews Resource reinforces the objective impression that she was predisposed to rule as she did.

Appearance of bad faith

101. Although the principle that decision makers must not demonstrate a reasonable apprehension of bias does not require actual bias, the Appellant respectfully submits that the circumstances of the General Secretary's ruling support the possibility that bad faith

for the purposes of the common law was present at either the General Secretary or Toronto Conference level.

102. At common law, one of the hallmarks of bad faith is where a process is put in place, ostensibly for a legitimate purpose, but really for another oblique, illegitimate or collateral purpose. In *Pal v Chatterjee*, six members of a Hindu temple's board set out a process for reviewing the membership of the other three members of the board. The process was not consistent with the bylaws of the temple. The Ontario Superior Court of Justice ruled that the process was conceived in bad faith to secure the termination of the other board members and therefore concluded that the board lacked legal authority to implement it.

Pal, supra at paras 45-48, Appellant's Book of Authorities, Tab 5

103. What the General Secretary actually had authority to do in this case was set out a procedural mechanism to address concerns with ordered ministers generally. However, the Appellant respectfully submits that what the General Secretary did instead was set out a process that:
- i. Is clearly directed at a particular minister, the Appellant;
 - ii. Is based in part on an improper, leading question;
 - iii. Is based in part on a question that was not asked of her;
 - iv. Exceeds the authority granted under the provision of *The Manual* that she relied upon; and
 - v. Fails to give due consideration to proper alternatives under *The Manual*.
104. With respect, the Appellant submits that this gives rise to the apprehension that, while ostensibly neutral, the process set out by the General Secretary at the request of the Executive of the Toronto Conference was designed specifically for the collateral purpose of securing the termination of the Appellant as a minister of the UCC.

III. THE COURT THAT MADE THE DECISION FAILED TO CONSIDER THE MATTER AS COMPLETELY AS PRACTICABLE

105. As argued above, the General Secretary failed to consider the matter as completely as practicable by failing to consider the confines of her authority and proceeding to rule on questions outside of her authority. Amongst other things, the particulars are as follows:
- i. The General Secretary exceeded her authority pursuant to s. E.4.2.3(f) of *The Manual* by ruling on substantive matters rather than “questions about the polity, procedures, and practices of the United Church”;
 - ii. The General Secretary exceeded her authority by unilaterally redefining the Church’s understanding of ministry, contrary to s. 8.6.2(1)(a)(iii) of *The Manual*, without engaging in a category 3 remit as required by s. F.2.1.3(c); and,
 - iii. The General Secretary’s ruling failed to consider the UCC’s own best practices guides with respect to review processes and the principles of natural justice.
106. Further, as argued above, the General Secretary failed to consider the matter as completely as practicable by failing to consider her obligation to abide by the mandatory requirements of procedural fairness and natural justice. In particular, the Appellant and her congregation were denied any opportunity to make representations prior to the General Secretary’s ruling.
107. In addition to failing to fully consider the requirements of *The Manual* and failing to consult with the affected parties or the presbyteries, the General Secretary also failed to consider any theological scholarship outside of *The Manual*. As set out in the affidavit of Randy Bowes, both WHUC and the Reverend Vosper have been in contact with theological experts who could assist with questions of doctrinal interpretation for the benefit of any discussions within the UCC on the Church’s understanding of ministry. There was no evidence in the General Secretary’s ruling that the General Secretary turned her mind to the availability and applicability of any theological scholarship.

Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Paragraph 23

IV. THE DECISION WAS NOT REASONABLE BASED ON THE EVIDENCE

108. The Supreme Court of Canada defines a review on the standard of reasonableness as being:

...concerned mostly with the existence of justification, transparency and intelligibility within the decision-making process. But it is also concerned with whether the decision falls within a range of possible, acceptable outcomes which are defensible in respect of the facts and law.

Dunsmuir v New Brunswick, 2008 SCC 9 (CanLII) at para 47, Appellant's Book of Authorities, Tab 7

109. As argued above, the ruling of the General Secretary cannot be justified on the basis of pre-existing UCC polity or any grant of authority to create new polity. With respect, it was not appropriate or justifiable to rule on substantive matters of Church doctrine in the guise of a procedural ruling. The Appellant respectfully submits that the General Secretary's ruling was made without consultation, without doctrinal authority, and without regard to the principles of natural justice. As a result, it is unsurprising that the ruling is not defensible on the facts or the law.
110. With respect to legal issues, as set out above, the General Secretary exceeded her authority to interpret UCC "polity, procedures, and practice" by ruling on substantive issues without broader consultation. She unilaterally reinterpreted a number of doctrinal concepts, ultimately leading her to redefine the Church's understanding of ministry without engaging in a category 3 remit as required by *The Manual*. In so doing, she utterly failed to consider the "best practices" recommended by the UCC.
111. With respect to the factual issues, the ruling does not meet the needs of the Appellant, her congregation, her presbytery, or the Toronto Conference. The General Secretary imposed a review process that was not requested by any party when interim measures were both appropriate and available. Rather than engaging in a rewarding process of discussion and reflection, the General Secretary preferred the most narrow and punitive procedure available under *The Manual*, to the detriment of the entire denomination.
112. Accordingly, the Appellant respectfully submits that the General Secretary's ruling does not fall "within a range of possible, acceptable outcomes which are defensible in respect of the facts and law."

V. THERE IS EVIDENCE AVAILABLE THAT COULD NOT HAVE BEEN PRODUCED EARLIER AND THAT MAY BE RELEVANT

113. General Council 42, which took place in August 2015, reviewed two nearly identical proposals from Hamilton and Toronto Conference asking the Church for a broad based theological review of the questions of ordination. Both proposals were made after the proceedings were initiated against Rev. Vosper and were largely seen as connected to Rev. Vosper's case. The Toronto Conference proposal was narrowly defeated in a motion to take no action on mandating a review of the Basis of Union (51 percent voting in favour, 45 voted no, remaining abstaining). The Hamilton proposal was referred to the Executive of the General Council. Both proposals are indicative of the fact that the General Secretary's ruling, and its effect on the Reverend Vosper, are necessarily causing members of the UCC to raise questions and concerns about the role of the questions of ordination in particular and the Church's understanding of ministry in general.

Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Exhibit R

114. The denomination has not sought any evidence from Rev. Vosper or West Hill United Church regarding the proceedings that have been taken against them. As noted above, neither the General Secretary nor the Toronto Conference has invited submissions from Rev. Vosper or WHUC on their position *vis a vis* the General Secretary's ruling and the resulting order for a review.

See: Affidavit of Randy Bowes

115. The affidavit of Randy Bowes, Chair of the Board for West Hill United Church outlines the congregation's efforts to communicate with the UCC with respect to the proceedings taken against Rev. Vosper and the WHUC community as a whole. Recognizing that a review of Rev. Vosper is by extension a review of the WHUC's ministry as a congregation, the congregation has made numerous attempts to connect with the denomination to have their voice heard. To date, they have not received the courtesy of any meaningful consultation in return.

See: Affidavit of Randy Bowes

116. Further, the Bowes Affidavit attaches a compendium of correspondence received by Rev. Vosper and WHUC received in relation to the proceedings facing Rev. Vosper. This compendium is voluminous, numbering hundreds of documents, and it includes written

letters and emails. The totality of the correspondence demonstrates that the understanding of ministry within the UCC, by its own members, is very much a live issue, warranting a wider conversation at the national level.

Affidavit of Randy Bowes, Exhibit S

117. Finally, the Appellant has submitted that the ruling of the General Secretary improperly imports substantive considerations to a question of procedure. In addition to consultation with the presbyteries of the UCC, the Appellant respectfully submits that the scope of the General Secretary's ruling renders it appropriate to consult theological experts who could assist with questions of doctrinal interpretation. There is no indication in the ruling that the General Secretary did so. We have attached as schedules to this statement of argument additional reference materials and sources of contemporary scholarship which support the current thought and practice found at WHUC.

Affidavit of Randy Bowes, paragraph 23

See: Schedule "C" – Additional Reference Materials

See: Schedule "D": Contemporary Scholarship in support of thought and practice at West Hill United Church (WHUC) & WHUC Faith Statements

PART IV – COSTS

118. The Appeal Committee has discretion to order costs in respect of an appeal.

See: Appeals, supra, p 11

119. The Appellant respectfully submits that she ought to be awarded costs in this matter regardless of whether or not she is successful on the appeal. These proceedings have been necessitated by actions of the UCC and raise novel issues that are fundamental not only to the Appellant's ability to continue in her calling as a minister, but to the denomination generally. The Appellant submits that it would therefore be unjust to award costs against her. It is a principal of the common law that tribunals may decline to award costs against litigants where any of the following circumstances apply:

- i. The case raises novel issues of legal interpretation, or in this case doctrinal interpretation;
- ii. The case raises issues of public importance, even if the litigants have a personal stake in the outcome; and
- iii. There is a significant financial disparity between the parties.

***Sutcliffe v Ontario (Minister of the Environment)* (2004), 191 OAC 370; 2004 CarswellOnt 4497 (Ont CA) (WL) at para 1, Appellant's Book of Authorities, Tab 8**

120. The Appellant respectfully submits that each of those circumstances are present in this case.

121. In a decision that was upheld by the Court of Appeal and Supreme Court of Canada, costs were awarded against the Attorney General of Ontario in a case that challenged an order granting a children's aid society wardship over a child who was a Jehovah's Witness. The order was made to ensure that the child received a blood transfusion that her parents refused to allow due to their religious beliefs. The parents were awarded costs despite being unsuccessful in their legal challenge. The Court of Appeal cited three factors that justified the award of costs, in order of importance:

- i. The litigation was triggered by an act of the state, and the parents' legal action was necessary to enforce their rights;
- ii. The issue was of national importance; and
- iii. The case proceeded in an unnecessarily complex manner.

***B(R) v Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto* (1992), 10 OR (3d) 321; 1992 CarswellOnt 301 (Ont CA) (WL) at paras 100-109; aff'd by [1995] 1 SCR 315 (SCC), Appellant's Book of Authorities, Tab 9**

122. The Appellant submits that this case is directly analogous. These proceedings were initiated by the actions of the Toronto Conference and the General Secretary, forcing the Appellant to respond to protect her rights as an employee and member of the UCC. The issues raised are of national importance to the UCC, as demonstrated by the overwhelming

response the Appellant and the WHUC has received from across the country. The Church's understanding of ministry is foundational to the shared values of the denomination. Finally, as argued above, there were many options short of pursuing a formal review that were available to both the Toronto Conference and the General Secretary with respect to any concerns regarding the ministry WHUC. It was not the Appellant or her congregation's desire to resort to quasi-legal proceedings without first engaging in any form of dialogue or informal resolution discussions.

PART V – ORDER SOUGHT

123. The Appellant respectfully requests, on the basis of the arguments set out above with respect to each ground of appeal, that the Appeal Committee proceed to hear the appeal on one or more of the grounds.

ALL OF WHICH IS RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED

Signed at Toronto, this 18th day of September 2015



Julian N. Falconer (L.S.U.C No. 29465R)
Akosua Matthews (L.S.U.C. No. 65621V)

FALCONERS LLP

Barristers-at-law
 10 Alcorn Ave., Suite 204
 Toronto, Ontario
 M4V 3A9

Tel: (416) 964-0495
 Fax: (416) 929-8179

Lawyers for the Appellant

SCHEDULE “A” – AUTHORITIES

1. *McCaw v United Church of Canada* (1991), 82 DLR (4th) 289; 1991 CarswellOnt 929 (Ont CA) (WL)
2. *Lakeside Colony of Hutterian Brethren v Hofer*, [1992] 3 SCR 165 (SCC)
3. *Lindenburger v United Church of Canada* (1985), 10 OAC 191; 1985 CarswellOnt 864 (Ont Div Ct) (WL)
4. *Davis v United Church of Canada* (1991), 92 DLR (4th) 678; 1991 CarswellOnt 1076 (OCJ Gen Div) (WL)
5. *Pal v Chatterjee*, 2013 ONSC 1329 (CanLII)
6. *Baker v Canada (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration)*, [1999] 2 SCR 817 (CanLII)
7. *Dunsmuir v New Brunswick*, 2008 SCC 9 (CanLII)
8. *Sutcliffe v Ontario (Minister of the Environment)* (2004), 191 OAC 370; 2004 CarswellOnt 4497 (Ont CA) (WL)
9. *B(R) v Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto* (1992), 10 OR (3d) 321; 1992 CarswellOnt 301 (Ont CA) (WL); aff'd by [1995] 1 SCR 315 (SCC)

SCHEDULE “B” – UCC POLITY PROVISIONS

The Manual, 2013

The Basis of Union: Doctrine

Twenty Articles of Doctrine

2.3.17 Article XVII. *Of the Ministry.* We believe that Jesus Christ, as the Supreme Head of the Church, has appointed therein an ordained ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Pastoral Care and a diaconal ministry of Education, Service, and Pastoral Care, and calls men and women to these ministries; and that the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, recognizes and chooses those whom He calls, and should thereupon duly ordain or commission them to the work of the ministry.

...

A Statement of Faith, 1940

2.4.8 VIII. The Ministry

We believe that God has appointed a Ministry in His Church for the preaching of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments, and the pastoral care of the people.

We believe that the Church has authority to ordain to the Ministry by prayer and the laying on of hands those whom she finds, after due trial, to be called of God thereto.

We believe that, for the due ordering of her life as a society, God has appointed a government in His Church, to be exercised, under Christ the head, by Ministers and representatives of the people.

So we acknowledge the Holy Ministry appointed by God for the spread of the Gospel and the edification of His Church.

The Basis of Union: Polity

V. The General Council

...

8.6 The General Council shall have full power:

8.6.1 to determine the number and boundaries of the Conferences, have oversight of them, and review their records;

8.6.2 (1) to legislate on matters respecting the doctrine, worship, membership, and government of the Church, subject to the following conditions:

(a) First, that before any rule or law relative to these matters can become a permanent law, it must receive the approval of a majority of the Presbyteries, and, if advisable, Pastoral Charges also. It shall be considered advisable to obtain the approval of a majority of Pastoral Charges also only if the General Council has determined that the proposed rule or law involves a substantive change that, in the opinion of the General Council: (2007)

i. alters the nature of the courts of the Church; (2007)

ii. significantly changes the structures of the Church; (2007)

iii. redefines the Church's understanding of ministry; (2007)

iv. affects the articles of faith except for gender language applied to human beings; (2007)

v. changes the baptismal formula or vows made upon ordination or commissioning; (2007)

vi. moves a section from this Basis of Union to the By-Laws; or (2007)

vii. alters the Church's understanding of membership. (2007)

(b) Second, that no terms of admission to full membership shall be prescribed other than those laid down in the New Testament.

(c) And third, that the freedom of worship at present enjoyed in the negotiating Churches shall not be interfered with in the United Church;

(2) to legislate on all matters respecting property, subject to the limitations elsewhere provided in the Basis of Union, and subject also to the approval of the Conference in which the property is situated;

...

The Basis of Union: Polity

IV. Commissioning, Ordination, and Admission

...

11.2 The Conference shall examine each Candidate on the Statement of Doctrine of the United Church and shall, before ordination, commissioning, or admission, be satisfied that such Candidate is in essential agreement therewith, and as a member of the Order of Ministry of the United Church accepts the statement as being in substance agreeable to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures.

...

C.3.1 Oversight of Pastoral Charges and Other Local Ministry Units

3.1.1 General

The presbytery is responsible for the oversight of the pastoral charges and other local ministry units in the presbytery. This responsibility includes

(a) reviewing their records;

(b) taking action to promote their religious life; and

(c) ensuring that they comply with the policies and the polity of the United Church.

The “polity” of the United Church means the form of organization and government of the United Church as it is set out in these bylaws.

...

E.4.2 General Secretary

...

4.2.3 Responsibilities

The General Secretary is the senior staff and administrative officer of the General Council, its executive, and its sub-executive.

The General Secretary is responsible for

(a) assisting the Executive of the General Council in discharging its responsibilities;

(b) preparing for the meetings of the General Council, its executive, and its sub-executive;

(c) preparing and circulating a report of the meetings of the General Council, its executive, and its sub-executive;

(d) arranging for implementation of the decisions by the General Council, its executive, and its sub-executive;

(e) facilitating the work of the committees and commissions of the General Council;

(f) ruling on questions about the polity, procedures, and practice of the United Church;

(g) preparing draft changes to *The Manual* for the General Council or its executive to consider;

(h) overseeing publication of *The Manual*;

- (i) preparing the annual budget of the General Council for the Executive of the General Council to consider;
- (j) having possession of the corporate seal of the United Church and the documents and records of the General Council;
- (k) serving as an automatic member of any committee established to direct planning or research;
- (l) serving as a general liaison officer for the courts of the United Church; and
- (m) performing other duties as assigned by the General Council.

...

F. 2. Remits

The General Council may change the Basis of Union only if the change is approved through a remit. A “remit” is a vote by presbyteries or by presbyteries and pastoral charges to change the Basis of Union.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada, The Methodist Church, and the Congregational Churches of Canada united in 1925 to form The United Church of Canada. Their agreement was set out in a document called the Basis of Union. This document was part of the federal and provincial legislation that created the United Church. It contains a statement of faith and an outline of the structure and basic policies of the United Church. See current Basis of Union at pages 11–44.

2.1 Categories of Remits

There are three categories of remits.

2.1.1 Category 1 Remits

Category 1 remits are for wording or editorial changes to the Basis of Union, including

- (a) replacing existing words or phrases with updated terms;
- (b) reorganizing text;
- (c) giving corresponding membership in a court to a specific office or position; or
- (d) changing the gender language used for human beings in the Articles of Faith in the Basis of Union.

2.1.2 Category 2 Remits

Category 2 remits are for changes to the Basis of Union that are significant but not denomination-shaping, including

- (a) changing the composition of the courts with minimal impact;
- (b) reflecting general practice within the United Church;
- (c) changing a process or procedure; or
- (d) establishing or changing requirements for specific policies or processes.

2.1.3 Category 3 Remits

Category 3 remits are for substantive changes to the Basis of Union that affect denominational identity, including

- (a) altering the nature of the courts;
- (b) significantly changing the structures of the church;
- (c) redefining the church’s understanding of ministry;
- (d) affecting the articles of faith, except for gender language applied to human beings;
- (e) changing the baptismal formula or vows made upon commissioning or ordination;
- (f) moving a section from the Basis of Union to the bylaws; or
- (g) changing the church’s understanding of membership.

...

H.3.2 The Discernment Process

3.2.1 Policy

Through discernment, the inquirer and the United Church explore and determine the inquirer's suitability for ministry in the United Church. They consider the inquirer's

- (a) call to ministry;
- (b) personal character;
- (c) motives; and
- (d) faith

...

H. 8.2 Readiness and Suitability for Admission

A minister from another denomination may be admitted to the order of ministry of the United Church if

- (a) they have an understanding of the ethos, polity, and history of the United Church that they have acquired through education;
- (b) they are in essential agreement with the doctrine of the United Church as stated in the Basis of Union; and
- (c) they agree to comply with the polity of the United Church.

...

J.2. Police Records Checks

The United Church has processes to determine suitability for ministry. One process requires individuals who are, or are seeking to be, in ministry positions to obtain a police records check on an ongoing basis.

Ministry personnel, inquirers, and candidates are responsible for getting a police records check and giving it to a court or a committee at various times in their life in ministry. Courts and committees are responsible for ensuring that this responsibility is properly fulfilled.

There are additional policies and procedures that apply to police records checks. They include details about the types of police records checks required, the times they are required, and the courts and committees that must receive them.

...

J.5. Principles of Conflict Resolution

Whenever there is a conflict between people in the body of Christ, there is pain and anxiety on all sides. Conflicts may arise because of strongly held and differing ideas, violations of rights, and our own human imperfections. When conflicts go unresolved, the body suffers wounds. The longer the body suffers, the deeper the wounds go. Conflicts also take time, energy, and other resources away from our work in mission.

Some conflicts may be preventable. There are processes in the church to address the possibility of conflict in a proactive way.

See section J.1 above and I. Pastoral Relations 2.5 for some policies and processes that may help to prevent conflict.

Where conflict does arise, the church is called to resolve it and to deal pastorally with the pain that it causes. This requires compassionate love, forgiveness, wholeness, and humility. It also requires that justice be done, and be seen to be done. There can be no shalom without justice.

Conflicts must be resolved as quickly and as fairly as possible. The church has informal processes that people involved in a conflict may use to try to resolve the conflict themselves. They may call on others who are experienced in these processes to help them with resolving the conflict.

Early reconciliation of conflict is not always possible. The church has formal processes in which people outside of the conflict decide the outcome for those who are in it.

Everyone involved in a formal process must remember that, individually and collectively, they are all accountable to and under the overall authority of Jesus Christ.

There are Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel available from the General Council Office. The standards may be used as a resource in any informal or formal process that involves ministry personnel.

J. 9. Presbytery Action—Ministry Personnel *The presbytery may use the Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel as a resource in its oversight of ministry personnel. They are available from the General Council Office.*

...

J. 9.3 Presbytery's Response—Ordering a Review

The presbytery must decide if the concerns raise a question for the presbytery as to whether the ministry personnel

(a) is effective; or

(b) recognizes the authority of the presbytery.

If the presbytery decides that either or both of these questions are raised, it must order a review of the situation. The review will be postponed if the ministry personnel is on maternity or parental leave.

...

There is no mandatory process for a review. The presbytery must, however, conduct the review in a way that meets the requirements for procedural fairness under secular law. The Pastoral Charge and Ministry Personnel Reviews resource available from the General Council Office sets out these requirements. It also provides guidance on how the review might be conducted in order to meet these requirements.

...

J. 13.6 Grounds for Appeal

An appeal must be made on one or more of the following grounds:

(a) the court that made the decision failed to consider the matter as completely as practicable;

(b) the decision was not in accordance with the rules of natural justice;

(c) the decision was not reasonable based on the evidence;

(d) the decision was not in accordance with the polity of the United Church; or

(e) there is evidence available that could not have been produced earlier and that may be relevant.

...

J.13.9.4 Decisions of Judicial Committee

a. Final until General Council: All decisions of the Judicial Committee of the General Council made under section J.13.9.2 above are final and binding on all parties until the next regular meeting of the General Council.

b. Report to General Council: The General Secretary of the General Council is responsible for reporting all decisions made by the Judicial Committee since the previous regular meeting of the General Council.

c. Review of Decision by General Council: The General Council may review but not rehear any decision of the Judicial Committee that has been reported to it and

(i) affirm the decision; or

(ii) refer the decision to the Judicial Committee for further hearing.

d. Grounds for Review: A review may be made on one or more of the following grounds:

- (i) the Judicial Committee failed to consider the matter as completely as practicable;
- (ii) the decision was not in accordance with the rules of natural justice;
- (iii) the decision was not reasonable based on the evidence;
- (iv) the decision was not in accordance with the polity of the United Church; and
- (v) there is evidence available that could not have been produced earlier and that may be relevant.

e. Final Decision: The decision of the Judicial Committee is considered to be the final decision of the General Council if

- (i) it has been reported to the General Council and not reviewed; or
- (ii) it has been reported to the General Council, reviewed, and affirmed.

I. 1.7.6 Evaluation

The Conference must evaluate the effectiveness of the interim minister after each period of interim ministry. The Interim Ministry Transition Committee participates in this evaluation.

There are additional procedures for the appointment and evaluation of an interim minister. See the Interim Ministry resource available from the General Council Office.

Appeals Resource (August 2013)

Are there grounds for an appeal?

The Appeal Committee must review the appellant's statement and any reply from the other parties and decide whether one or more of the grounds for an appeal listed in section J.13.6 are met. If one or more of the grounds are met, the Appeal Committee will make a decision to proceed to hear the appeal. If not, the Appeal Committee will make a decision to refuse to hear the appeal.

At this stage of the process, the Appeal Committee does not need to be convinced that the appellant would win the appeal. The Appeal Committee does not even need to be persuaded on the balance of probabilities (i.e., 51 percent certain). While it is always up to the Appeal Committee to decide whether or not there are grounds for an appeal, here is a suggested guideline. The Appeal Committee could decide to hear the appeal if, in the Appeal Committee's opinion,

- the appellant has raised one or more issues that are based on the grounds listed in J.13.6;
- the other parties have not completely negated those issues through the arguments contained in the reply; and
- those issues deserve further consideration in an appeal hearing.

After the Appeal Committee has made its decision, it must give notice of its decision to both parties. The notice must be given as set out in section J.14.4. If the committee's decision is to refuse to hear the appeal, the reasons for the decision must be included with the notice.

Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel (2008)

Introduction

The United Church of Canada believes that all people are children of God, created in the image of God and therefore worthy of respect and love. Living out that belief requires a deep sense of mutuality, trust, and accountability. There are, however, times when the church does not live out that commitment. As a result, people suffer—both people within the community and people outside it. We believe that one suffers, all suffer together (1 Cor. 12:26). Discipline has to do with the good of others, with mutual accountability and with the “building up” of the community of faith.

The 38th General Council (2003) charged the Task Group on the Exercise of Discipline of Ministry Personnel with developing standards of practice and ethical standards for ministry personnel, and with evaluating existing practices through which ministry personnel are held accountable. The development and implementation of standards represents a first step in the rethinking and possible development of a broader policy of discipline for ministry personnel. Ethical standards are developed so that ministry personnel may commit to agreed-upon standards of conduct that will guide their practice and behaviour.

Responses to the questionnaire in 2004 and the draft standards document in 2005 contained much support for the development of ethical standards and suggested that they may be used as

- a common set of values

- a basis for talking openly about ethical issues and concerns

- a foundation for creating a stronger sense of community

- a starting point for productive resolutions

- an operating framework within the church that provides for transparency and principled behaviour

- a set of norms for the education and formation of ministry personnel

Ethical standards enable the church to attain two goals. They act as a resource for ministry personnel as they struggle with ethical issues and dilemmas in the context of their daily practice. Ethical standards also enable ministry personnel to be accountable to self, church, and community.

Among the many questions addressed during the development of the ethical standards was: “How are ethical standards to be articulated?” Clearly, it is not possible to anticipate and specify how one should behave in every circumstance. In many ways, it is easier to be specific about what one should *not* do than what one *should* do. However, a list of prohibitions may imply that everything is allowable unless otherwise prohibited. Rather than focus on the negative, the task group has opted to use affirmative language when drafting the ethical standards. The intent is to highlight the expectation rather than identify the prohibition.

The standards of practice describe practices to which ministry personnel aspire. They recognize that personal and professional growth is a developmental process and that ministry personnel move through a variety of career and life changes that affect their practice of ministry.

In practice, ministry personnel are expected to know and understand the culture of the ministries in which they serve so that they are responsive to the spiritual needs of those contexts. They take seriously local traditions of faith and worship, and share their faith in ways that are relevant and constructive.

Ministry personnel are responsible for leading, guiding, and supporting the community of faith in the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. What is more, they touch people's lives at various points of joy, pain, celebration, and vulnerability. Ministry personnel do this in a variety of ways—by leading in worship, by providing pastoral care, by standing with those who suffer, and by working for justice and peace.

These standards are not to be viewed as measurements of performance. Rather, they are descriptions of practice to which ministry personnel aspire.

The 39th General Council (2006) received the report “The Exercise of Discipline of Ministry Personnel” and adopted the draft standards of practice as standards of practice for ministry personnel in The United Church of Canada and the draft ethical standards as ethical standards for ministry personnel in The United Church of Canada.

A motion to amend, which was carried, required the word “profession” be removed from the documents, and replaced with the word “vocation.”

Ministry is a calling and a vocation. The standards of practice and the ethical standards address the professional nature of the vocation of ministry. In order to comply with the amendment, and at the same time retain the integrity of the standards of practice and ethical standards, the word vocation has been inserted in the following document where appropriate, but where reference is made to professional skills and training, and to the level of accountability and expertise, and expected behaviours or practices for ministry personnel, the word profession remains.

Standards of Practice

The standards are presented alphabetically. Ministry personnel, Ministry and Personnel Committees, and other bodies to which ministry personnel are responsible may want to order the standards of practice according to the priorities of the particular pastoral charge or appointment.

....

Ethical Standards

The ethical standards are presented alphabetically. The document does not represent an attempt at establishing priority or sequence.

....

Polity: The polity of the United Church includes all the policies and procedures for accountability, organizational structure, and decision-making that are followed in the church, as set out in The Manual and other church documents.

Congregational Designated Minister (August 2013)

Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice

Congregational designated ministers (CDMs) are employees of a pastoral charge and are accountable to the pastoral charge as stipulated in the position description. For the purposes of disciplinary oversight, congregational designated ministers are subject to the same review process that applies to ministry personnel who are directly accountable to the presbytery (see Section J.9 of *The Manual*).

The policy that defines the effectiveness of congregational designated ministers and ministry personnel, known as the Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice, was approved by the 38th General Council. Please familiarize yourself with these standards.

Pastoral Charge and Ministry Personnel Reviews (August 2013)

About This Resource

This resource contains information, guidance, and advice on the best ways to live out mandatory policies and procedures. You are encouraged but not required to follow these best practices. Following these best practices will help ensure compliance with secular law requirements that apply to reviews.

...

Best Practices for Reviews

...

The sections in *The Manual* do not contain much guidance as to *how* a review process is to be carried out. The best practices contained in this resource are offered to assist those involved in the review process. They contain advice only. They are not mandatory, and there may be valid reasons for doing things differently in a particular case. In all cases, however, it is mandatory for the presbytery, the reviewer, and all others involved in the review process to comply with the requirements of *The Manual* and of natural justice under the secular law. The consequences of not complying with these requirements are serious: the decision resulting from the review may be overturned on appeal or by the secular courts. For this reason, the United Church legal/judicial counsel strongly recommend that these best practices be followed.

...

SCHEDULE “C” – ADDITIONAL REFERENCE MATERIALS

Bibliography

Phyllis Airhart, *A Church with the Soul of a Nation: Making and Re-Making The United Church of Canada*, (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s UP, 2013)

John Allman *et al*, “The Anterior Cingulate Cortex: The Evolution of an Interface between Emotion and Cognition,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Science* 935 (May 2001)

John Allman *et al*, “The Von Economo Neurons in Frontoinsular and Anterior Cingulate Cortex in Great Apes and Humans,” *Brain Structure and Function* 214, nos. 5-6 (June 2010)

Henry Warner Bowden, *Church History in an Age of Uncertainty: Historiographical Patterns in the United States, 1906-1990*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1991)

Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997)

Marcus Borg, *Speaking Christian: Why Christian Words Have Lost Their Meaning and Power -- And How They Can Be Restored* (New York: HarperOne, 2011)

John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998)

John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993)

John Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer*, (New York: HarperOne, 2007)

Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, (Toronto: Viking Penguin, 2006)

Robin Dunbar and Susanne Shultz, “Evolution in the Social Brain,” *Science* 7, vol 317, no. 5843 (September 2007)

Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and the Faith We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003)

Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006)

Richard Dawkins, “Postmodernism Disrobed.” *A Devil’s Chaplain* (New York: First Mariner, 2004)

Robert Doran, *Birth of a Worldview: Early Christianity in Its Jewish and Pagan Context* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995)

Bart Ehrman, *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament* (New York, Oxford UP, 2012)

M. D. Faber, *The Magic of Prayer: An Introduction to the Psychology of Faith* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002)

Andrew Freeman, "Theology and the Church" (address at King's College, Cambridge, ULK, July 14, 1994), Sea of Faith Network, www.sofn.org.ul/theology/freeman.html

Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (1841; repr, Buffalo Prometheus, 19e9)

Northrope Frye, *Words with Power: Being a Second Study of the Bible and Literature* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992)

Lloyd Geering, *Christian Faith at the Crossroads: A Map of Modern Religious History* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 2001)

Lloyd Geering, *Christianity Without God* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 2002)

Lloyd Geering, *Fundamentalism: The Challenge to the Secular World* (Wellington: St. Andrew's Trust, 2003)

Jack Good, *The Dishonest Church*, (Scotts Valley: Rising Star, 2003)

Douglas John Hall, *The Future of the Church: Where Are We Headed?* (Toronto: UCPH, 1989)

Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2004)

David J. H. Hart, *Christianity: A New Look at Ancient Wisdom*, (Kelowna, BC: Wood Lake, 2005)

Richard Holloway, *Between the Monster and the Saint* (Edinburgh: Canongate., 2008)

Sharon Hymer, "Therapeutic and Redemptive Aspects of Religious Confession," *Journal of Religion and Health* 34, no. 1 (Spring 1995), 41-54

Hans Kung, *On Being a Christian* (London: Chaucer, 1979)

Steven Law, *Believing Bullshit: Hot Not to Get Sucked into an Intellectual Black Hole* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2011)

Nigel Leaves, *The God Problem: Alternatives to Fundamentalism* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 2006)

Nigel Leaves, *Religion Under Attack: Getting Theology Right* (Salem, OR: Polebridge, 2011)

Chaeyoon Lim and Robert Putnam, "Religion, Social Networks and Life Satisfaction," *American Sociological Review* 75, no. 6 (December, 2010) 914-33

David B. Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992)

Marci McDonald, *The Armageddon Factor: The Rise of Christian Nationalism in Canada*, (Toronto, Random House, 2010)

Robert Miller, ed., *The Future of the Christian Tradition*, (Polebridge: Santa Rosa, 2007)

Robert Bruce Mullin, *Miracles and the Modern Religious Imagination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996)

William Murry, *Reason and Reverence: Religious Humanism for the 21st Century* (Boston: Skinner House, 2007)

Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist* (New York, Ballantine, 2009)

H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, (New York: Henry Holt, 1957, orig. 1929)

Rick Ostrander, *The Life of Prayer in a World of Science: Protestants, Prayer, and American Culture, 1870-19309* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000)

Stephen Pattison, *Shame Theory, Terapy, Theology* (Cambridge, UL: Cambridge UP, 2000)

Raymond Pelly and Peter Stuart, eds. *A Religious Atheist? Critical Essays on the Work of Lloyd Geering* (Dunedin, NZ: Otago UP, 2006)

John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God*, (London: SCM Press, 1963)

Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1986)

Donald Schweitzer, *The United Church of Canada: A History* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2011)

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York, Mentor, 1964)

Katharine Smithrim and Melanie Craig-Hansford, *Prayers for Women Who Can't Pray*, (South Frontenac, ON: Wintergreen Studio Press, 2012)

John Shelby Spong, *A New Christianity for a New World: Mhy Traditional Faith is Dying and How a New Faith Is Being Born*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2001)

Jerome Stone, *The Minimalist Version of Transcendence: A Naturalist Philosophy of Religion* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1992)

Martin D. Stringer, *A Sociological History of Christian Worship*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005)

Barbara Brown Taylor, *When God is Silent*, (Boston: Cowley, 1998)

Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1961)

Lionel Tiger and Michael McGuire, *God's Brain* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2010)

Gretta Vosper, *With or Without God: Why the Way We Live is More Important than What We Believe* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2008)

Gretta Vosper, *Amen: What Prayer Can Mean in a World Beyond Belief* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2012)

Nicholas Wade, *The Faith Instinct: How Religion Evolved and Why it Endures* (New York: Penguin, 2009)

Margaret Wheatley, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2001)

Textbooks and Sources of Required Reading, Queen's Theological College, 1987-1990

J. Maxwell Miller and John Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986)

Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979)

James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981)

William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988)

Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987)

Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives (Overtures to Biblical Theology)* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984)

Materials used in development of West Hill United Church as theologically barrier-free space

Embracing Transformation: Div

Asking Questions; Exploring Faith, 1998 - 2003. Sessions I, II, III, IV, V, VI

Faith Talk: Study of the Draft Statement of Faith

Faith Talks Final Submission

Conversations on Faith, 2005 - 2006: Sessions I, II, III, IV

In the Spirit, 2007 - 2008

List of speaking engagements

Canada

Launch, Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity (CCPC), 2004

CCPC, Barriers and Bridges, Oshawa, 2005

CCPC, Religionless Christianity, Ottawa, 2006

CCPC, Elements, Toronto, 2009

CCPC, Widen the Embrace, London, ON, 2011

Global Citizenship and Equity, Centennial College, 2011

The Story Evolves, Halifax, 2013

Beyond Hearts and Minds, Centennial College, 2013

Wellspring Cancer Wellness Centre, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014

Speech, ["It's Time"](#) given at the launch of the Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity, November 2004

Australia, 2010

Common Dreams, Melbourne

Adelaide

Canberra

Brisbane

Sydney

New Zealand, 2010

Auckland

Wellington

Christchurch

United Kingdom, 2014

London

Oxford

United States

Seattle, WA, 2013

Hendersonville, NC, 2014

Miami, FL, 2015

Denver, 2015

Presentations at United Church Training Centres given by Gretta Vosper
Progressive Thinking in the Church

Are We Who We Say We Are?

How Dare We?

List of United Church of Canada congregations at which Gretta Vosper has spoken

Bedford United, Halifax, NS

Fort Massey United, Halifax, NS

Sackville United, Sackville, NB

First St. Andrews, London, ON

Holly United Church Mission and Northwest Barrie United Church, Barrie, ON

Exeter United, Stratford, ON

Central United, Windsor, ON

Aurora United, Aurora, ON

First United, Port Credit, ON

George Street United, Peterborough, ON

St. John's United, Scarborough, ON

Thunder Bay United, Thunder Bay, ON

Sydenham Street United, Kingston, ON

St. Margaret's United, Kingston, ON

Churchill Park United, Winnipeg, MB

Southminster-Steinhauer United, Edmonton, AB

Hillhurst United, Calgary, AB

Robertson-Wesley United, Edmonton, AB

Fairfield United, Victoria, BC

SIGNIFICANT JOURNALS:

Rev. Vosper has written for the Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity journal, *Progressions* on several occasions. The most pertinent article being: "Charting a Course for Change" which was published in *Progressions* March of 2005.

SIGNIFICANT BLOGS & WEBSITES

[Dividing the United Church](#)

[Alien Invasion](#)

[A Progressive Path](#)

[What God Is Supposed to be Saying](#)

[Witchcraft and Sorcery](#)

[American Atheist: An Oxymoron?](#)

[Out of One Sea We Came](#)

[The Complexities of Language](#)

[What I Learned at the American Humanist Conference](#)

[Confronting the Unbelievers](#)

[Shucking God: An Interview with John Shuck](#)

[The Church of Gleaned Practices](#)

[Semantics Sleight of Hand](#)

[Abomination](#)

[Not Without Courage](#)

[A Letter to Gary Paterson](#)

[Pledge to Thaxted](#)

[The Atheist Minister](#)

[With or Without God Goes UK](#)

[Fair Elections Act: A Letter to Canadian Senators](#)

[Intentionally Focused Contemplation: Prayer Beyond Belief](#)

[Alone Yet Not Alone](#)

[Favourite Letter to the Editor](#)

[Symbols and an Altered Crest](#)

[Essential Agreement](#)

[For the Woman Who Had Her Husband Phone](#)

[United Church Boycott of Goods from Israeli Settlements](#)

[Truth: Where It Is More Likely to Show Up](#)

[Too Much Information?](#)

[The Perfect Storm](#)

[Proud to be a Member of The United Church of Canada](#)

[What Is Progressive Christianity?](#)

[Why Are You Doing This?](#)

[What Does It Mean to be Christian, Pt. 1](#)

[What Does It Mean to be Christian, Pt. 2](#)

[On Becoming a Spiritually Non-Exclusive Congregation](#)

[Twelve Steps - for the rest of our lives](#)

<http://www.withorwithoutgod.ca>

**SCHEDULE “D” - CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP IN SUPPORT OF THOUGHT
AND PRACTICE AT WEST HILL UNITED CHURCH (WHUC) and WHUC FAITH
STATEMENTS**

Approach

Our ongoing understanding of theology and doctrine at West Hill United Church is developed in the tradition of the scholarship of F. Schleiermacher, R. Strauss, L. Feuerbach, P. Tillich, D. Bonhoeffer, Walter Kaufman, J. Robinson, Gordon Kaufman, Robert Funk, John Shelby Spong, Marcus Borg, Jerome Stone, Ursula Goodenough, Richard Holloway, Nigel Leaves, Don Cupitt, and Lloyd Geering, and also from the wisdom we find in ourselves and others within and beyond our community.

We offer a flexibly naturalistic approach to the spiritual/values/depth dimension of life, without requiring, assuming, or making any supernatural, theistic claims. Committed to humanistic ethical ideals of peace and justice for all people, we work towards personal and societal transformation through compassionate, just relationships with self, all others, and the world. Faith is understood as the open, positive, responsible embracing of life; beliefs are left up to the individual. We are committed to using language that is as natural and barrier-free as possible.

Terms

Theism is the belief in the existence of an invisible, eternal, supreme transcendent Being, the Creator and Sustainer of life with the supernatural attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, holiness, and perfect benevolence who interacts personally with human beings.

Trinitarianism is the belief that this one God exists as a Godhead of one substance yet three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Non-theism, post-theism, theological non-realism, secular and religious humanism, atheism, and naturalism are views of reality that do not include theism, given the absence of convincing evidence.

Resources

The following is an annotated bibliography of scholarship relevant to our development in areas of doctrine, belief, and language.

Theological non-theists, post-theists, theological non-realists

Adams, Sue & J. Salmon

Historian J. Salmon and theologian Sue Adams, with the Women's Resource Centre, Auckland, New Zealand

The mouth of the dragon: theology for postmodern Christians (1996)

"Revelation is neither necessary nor desirable. It is not necessary because the constructionist approach we are taking builds theology on human experience, language

and imagination. It is not desirable: it is a dominating concept by virtue of being closed to any investigation."

Carse, James P.

Director of the religious studies program at New York University.

The religious case against belief (2008)

Doctrine

What provides religion and religious texts with their vitality is that they "present [the readers] with a series of questions they deeply need to answer, and they need others to join them in the quest"...and... "as they come together to resolve these unknowns, the greater and the more imponderable they become—and the more irresistible...note that none of this has to do with belief, or truth...Religion, as understood in this way, is not a catalogue of assertions subject to evaluation and correction by nonparticipants in the *communitas*. Its essential writings are endlessly interpretable, resisting any kind of summary or translation into the language of "outsiders"—and "insiders"...permanently above all definitive restatement." p. 203

Critiquing doctrine

"This is Christianity's strongest feature: it tirelessly provokes its members to object to prevailing doctrines without having to abandon the faith. It is true that over the centuries it has often presented its doctrines as beliefs. As *doctrines*, or teachings, they depend for their effectiveness on the presence of students who will challenge and improve them. As *beliefs*, they depend on complicit listeners who adopt them without resistance, and do not exceed the prescribed limit of interpretation. But neither Christianity nor any of the great religions has ever been able to successfully erect barriers against the dreaded barbarian incursions of fresh ideas." p. 206

Cox, Harvey

Professor of Divinity emeritus at Harvard University. Addresses the rise and fall of belief and the coming age of the spirit; how doctrines and dogma in Christianity are giving way to new grassroots movements based in community, social justice, and spiritual experience.

The future of faith (2009)

"Philosophers and theologians were often torn between two convictions. On the one hand, they believed their societies needed religion to maintain order, but, on the other, they themselves could not honestly assent to such mythical propositions. Their uncomfortable solution was usually to defend—at least in public—a set of beliefs for ordinary people, but to reserve for themselves the right to have their private doubts. They knew these public beliefs were "noble lies", but they felt they were needed...Setting aside its obvious hypocrisy, this two-tiered solution was always fragile. It separated people into the many who *believe* (or are supposed to believe) and the few who *knew*....As more people learned...the double standard gradually came unraveled...in the past century, the portion of the population that can read and ask questions has become a majority, and the spread of the scientific method, which requires publicly verifiable evidence, has challenged the credibility of propositions that must be accepted on authority. A religion based on subscribing to mandatory beliefs is no longer viable...Creeds were always something theologians invented, often to stake out spheres of authority."

Cupitt, Don

Professor of Philosophy of Religion, Life Fellow at Emmanuel College, Cambridge University. Cupitt developed the theological approach of non-realism, holding that all religious ideas are human with a human history, all doctrines are myths, the idea of God is an entirely human creation, and Christianity must eventually move into a religion of ordinary human life and language.

- *Crisis of moral authority: the dethronement of Christianity* (1972)
- *Taking leave of God*. (1980, revised 2001)
- *The sea of faith* (1984)
- *After God: the future of religion* (1997)
- *Reforming Christianity* (2001)
- *The meaning of it all in everyday speech* London: SCM Press, 1999.
- *Is nothing sacred? The non-realist philosophy of religion* (2002)
- *Radical theology*. (200)
- *Above us only sky* (2008)
- *The fountain: a secular theology* (2010)

“the historical moment has come for us to...abandon the traditional ecclesiastical theology and its typically dualistic ways of thinking” in *Reforming Christianity* (see additional material below below)

Dawes, Gregory W.

Professor of religious studies and philosophy, University of Otago, New Zealand

“Religion without God?” in *A religious atheist? critical essays on the work of Lloyd Geering* (2006)

“The abolition of traditional theism is precisely what Lloyd Geering advocates...that Christianity both can and must become non-theistic...firstly because human autonomy demands that we no longer be enslaved to an external authority...and because monotheism...has led us to overlook our dependence on nature.” p. 116

de Chardin, Teilhard

French philosopher, geologist, paleontologist, Jesuit priest whose writings were censored by the Roman Catholic Church during his lifetime for his views on original sin, but who has been since praised by Pope Benedict XVI

Christianity and evolution (1971)

“If as the result of some interior revolution, I were to lose in succession my faith in Christ, my faith in a personal God, and my faith in spirit, I feel that I should continue to believe invincibly in the world. The world (Its value, its infallibility and its goodness)—that, when all is said and done, is the first, the last and the only thing in which I believe. It is by this faith that I live. And it is to this faith, I feel, at the moment of death, rising above all doubts, I shall surrender myself.”

Dworkin, Ronald

Professor of Law and Philosophy, New York University

Religion without God (2013)

“Belief in God is one manifestation of a deeper worldview, but not the only one. The conviction that god underwrites value presupposes a prior commitment to the independent reality of that value – a commitment that is available to nonbelievers as well. So theists and atheists share a commitment that is more fundamental than what divides them... The familiar stark divide between people of religion and without religion is too crude. Many millions of people who count themselves as atheists have convictions and experiences similar to and just as profound as those that believers count as religious... They feel an inescapable responsibility to live their lives well, with due respect for the lives of others; they take pride in a life they think well lived and suffer sometimes inconsolable regret at a life they think, in retrospect, wasted. They find the Grand Canyon not just arresting but breathtakingly and eerily wonderful. They are not simply interested in the latest discoveries about vast space but enthralled by them. These are not, for them, just a matter of immediate sensuous and otherwise inexplicable response. They express a conviction that the force and wonder they sense are real, just as real as planets or pain, that moral truth and natural wonder do not simply evoke awe but call for it.”

“William James said that one of the two essentials of religion is a sense of fundamentality: that there are “things in the universe” as he put it, “that throw the last stone.” Theists have a god for that role, but an atheist can think that the importance of living well throws the last stone, that there is nothing more basic on which that responsibility rests or needs to rest.” p. 2-14

Freeman, Anthony

Anglican priest, published *God in us: the case for Christian humanism* in 1993 and was subsequently dismissed from his parish for contravening church teaching, but remained a priest in the Church of England, managing editor of the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*

God in Us: the case for Christian Humanism. (1993, 2001)

God is not a supernatural being but the sum of all our values and ideals' guiding and inspiring our lives.

Funk, Robert T.

American biblical scholar, founder of the Westar Institute and the Jesus Seminar, chair of graduate studies in religion at Vanderbilt University, faculty member of numerous universities, executive secretary of the Society of Biblical Literature, and founder and first executive director of Scholars Press. Funk promoted biblical literacy with a historical-critical hermeneutical approach. He was highly skeptical of orthodox Christian belief including regarding the historical Jesus.

Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God (1966)

The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus (1993)

Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium (1996)

The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds (1998)

A Credible Jesus (2002)

From the Foreword to Lloyd Geering's *Christianity without God* (2002) by Robert W. Funk, Director Westar Institute

“Christians have become a-theists...no longer theists. They no longer believe in a personal, objective, thinking God ‘out there’ somewhere...What then is the future of Christianity? Is

Christianity tied irretrievably to a traditional doctrine of God? ...Geering has reframed this question as a thesis: Christianity should learn to exist without God. He believes we must take leave of God if we are to refurbish Christianity with terms and incentives suitable to the global age we are now entering.” He states that the doctrine of the Trinity began a humanization of God – “God and world were being rejoined”, but “the Church intervened on behalf of a father deity and a patriarchal hierarchy.” He suggests that by leaving the concept of God in the past, human freedom, basic human rights, and respect for all of nature will be affirmed. “Christianity has reached the stage at which it must learn to exist without God—without an external authority figure who blesses and condemns arbitrarily. In place of that deity he challenges us to assume responsibility for ourselves and for the earth we have inherited.”

Geering, Lloyd

Theologian, member of the Jesus Seminar, participant in the Living the Questions program, member of the Sea of Faith Network, Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, and principle lecturer at St. Andrew’s Trust for the Study of Religion and Society.

Geering rejected the idea that God is a supreme supernatural being who created the world and intervenes providentially in it. In 1967, Geering faced charges of heresy which were eventually dropped; later in his career he received many honours for his work in religious studies, including a COBE and Knight Grand Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit.

God in the new world (1968)

Faith’s new age: a perspective on contemporary religious change (1980)

Tomorrow’s God: How We Create our Worlds (1996, reprinted 2000)

The world to come: from Christian past to global future (1999)

Christian faith at the crossroads (revised 2001)

Christianity without God (2002)

Is Christianity going anywhere? (2004)

The greening of Christianity (2005)

In praise of the secular (2007)

Coming Back to Earth: From gods to God to Gaia (2009)

Such is life: a close encounter with Ecclesiastes (2010)

From the big bang to God: our awe-inspiring journey of evolution (2013)

Reimagining God: The Faith Journey of a Modern Heretic (2014)

The Judeo-Christian tradition has often “found itself so weighed down by its accumulating lore and mythology that it has had to jettison its excess baggage” and notes that the Protestant Reformers “abandoned a great deal of what had accumulated” and states that this next age “requires us to jettison a great deal more...including a post-mortem heaven and hell, a divine saviour, an objective personal deity, the doctrine of atonement, and the whole system of dogma that envelops them. These doctrines were once important as the expression of faith in a worldview where they were appropriate. That worldview has become obsolete, and in the modern world, these doctrines have become a hindrance to faith...Faith is not dependent on belief in a personal God...in common human experience faith is multi-faceted...that is why in various secular contexts we may be exhorted to put faith in ourselves, in our ideas, in other people, in the natural world. It is up to us to clarify for ourselves just what we most deeply revere and to recognize...that whatever we put our trust in becomes our God. We have to learn

throughout life to distinguish between idols and the God we can truly trust. In the context of the modern worldview, the theistic God has become a superstitious and idolatrous object. in *Coming back to earth* (2009) p. 61

(see additional material below)

Goodenough, Ursula

Professor of biology at Washington U. and Harvard, member of the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science, author of scientific texts and religious works, on the editorial board of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*

Sacred depths of nature (1998)

A natural approach to religion involves “a world view that does not include the supernatural, so it’s everything else.”

“The evolution of the cosmos invokes in me a sense of mystery; the increase in biodiversity invokes the response of humility; and an understanding of the evolution of death offers me helpful ways to think about my own death.”

(see additional material below)

Hampson, Daphne.

British theologian, holds the Chair in 'Post-Christian Thought' at the University of St Andrews, Scotland.

Emphasizes grounding theology in human religious experience, not revelation or authority. Christian claims to a unique revelation in Christ are incompatible with what has been known since the 18th century to be incompatible with reality. The Christian myth must be discarded, though acknowledged as having played an important role in developing religious sensibilities. The Christian doctrine of revelation regarding a transcendent God is problematic. Theology should become like any other discipline drawing on the past when that remains appropriate and taking novel directions when the progress of human knowledge or ethics demands it. God had best be understood as spirit, intimately interconnected with what we are. “I am a Western person, living in a post-Christian age, who has taken something with me from Christian thinkers, but who has rejected the Christian myth. Indeed I want to go a lot further than that. The myth is not neutral; it is highly dangerous. It is a brilliant, subtle, elaborate, male cultural projection, calculated to legitimise a patriarchal world and to enable men to find their way within it. We need to see it for what it is... I am quite clear there is an underlying goodness, beauty and order; that it is powerful, such that we can draw on it, while we are inter-related with it. I call that *God*.”^[15]

“That Which Is God” (2007)

Theology and Feminism (1990)

After Christianity (1997, Second edition, 2002)

Hick, John

English theologian and philosopher of religion.

The myth of God incarnate (1977)

“The historical Jesus of Nazareth did not teach or apparently believe that he was God, or God the Son, Second Person of a Holy Trinity, incarnate, or the son of God in a unique sense”

Holloway, Richard

Formerly Bishop of Edinburgh, now a writer, BBC book reviewer, former chair of the Scottish Arts Council. Holloway is regarded as one of the most progressive and controversial figures in the Church on theological and ethical issues. An agnostic radical thinker taking the descriptor of “after-religionist”.

(see additional material below)

Beyond Belief (1981)

Paradoxes of Christian Faith and Life (1984)

Crossfire: Faith and Doubt in an Age of Uncertainty (1988)

Dancing On the Edge: Faith In A Post-Christian Age (1997)

Godless Morality: Keeping Religion out of Ethics (1999)

- *Doubts and Loves: What is Left of Christianity* (2001)

Looking in the Distance: The Human Search for Meaning (2004)

Hoover Roy W.

Professor of Biblical Literature, and Professor of Religion Emeritus, Whitman College, Washington, member of Westar’s Jesus Seminar, author, with Robert Funk, of *The Five Gospels:*

The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus.

“Incredible creed, credible faith” in *The once and future faith* (the Jesus Seminar) (2001)

past “tradition becomes an idol...when it make the preservation and the repetition of the an end in itself. It claims to have the transcendent reality captive and encapsulated in that past, and it requires an idolatrous submission to the authority of tradition, since truth would not dare to appear outside it.”

people “...as I see it, religious language that conforms to the traditional theological paradigm of the ancient creeds in which humans are seen as “immortal souls” does not speak to who see themselves as biohistorical beings. Even to people who were born and raised in the church such religious talk has become a foreign language. The various attempts to “translate” this archaic speech by proposing that it should be read metaphorically or symbolically are finally only half-way measures even after all of the arguments in support of such “solutions” have been made. The residual literal meaning of the original literal language weighs down the “symbolic” and “metaphorical” interpretation and too often turns it into a form of religious mush. This lends itself to the perception that when such interpreters make a religious statement it is never quite clear whether they really mean it or not. The attractiveness of this “solution” appears to be that you can live in a state of blessed ambiguity: you can believe almost anything you like and think that you are being both thoroughly modern and thoroughly traditional at the same time, when actually you are being neither. It is proclaimed as good news that “you can have your historical Jesus and your spiritual Christ too.”...We should not be surprised if some who hear this line do not quite believe it. It leaves them in the limbo of too many blurred distinctions between fact and fiction, history and symbol Such is the price imposed by those who would have us try to live our religious lives in two disparate historical and cultural eras at the same time.” p. 90-91

Kaufman, Gordon

Professor of Divinity, Harvard Divinity School, teaching professor at Vanderbilt, author of over 12 books highly influential in liberal scholarship on Christian language and religious naturalism.

Theology for a nuclear age (1985)

“To help provide meaning and orientation for life in today’s world..we must be prepared to enter into the most radical deconstruction and reconstruction of the traditions we have inherited and this includes the most central and precious symbols of these traditions, *God* and *Jesus Christ*.” p. 13

In the face of mystery: a constructive theology (1993)

“Since much about the world was completely unknown to our religious traditions, and this significantly affects the way in which God had been conceived, theologians dare not simply take over traditional ideas; we must be prepared to criticize every use and interpretation of the symbol “God” that has appeared to date.” p. 28-29

Krop, H. A., Arie L. Molendijk, Hent de Vries

Dutch Professors of philosophy, history of Christianity, and metaphysics, respectively.

Post-theism: reframing the Judeo-Christian Tradition (2000)

Their work explores a variety of ways in which the concepts and arguments, imagery and rhetoric of the Judeo-Christian traditions are in need and in the process of being constantly displaced by more relevant language and message.

Petrole, Jean Ellen

Author, editor, and Professor of English at Columbia College, Chicago,

Religion without belief: contemporary allegory and the search for postmodern faith (2008) “An understanding of religion as “belief” (rather than as “practice” or openness to ecstatic experience) is destined to engender violence. Beliefs contradict and violate one another. Practices, insights, ecstatic moments—none of these contradict...The mature practice of religion—and any access to truth and reality it may provide—does not consist of believing this or that formulation, but in developing habits of being, ways of inhabiting our own minds and bodies. To practice religion without violence, we need religion without belief...faith as defined precisely by texts and creeds and practices...we need truth without dogma, meaning without exclusion...a submission to wonder, a possibility of transcending ordinary operations, a reverence for partially glimpsed fragments of knowing. These humble, provisional approaches to the true and the real are...what religion without violence—which is religion without belief—requires.” p. 165

Rasor, Paul

Director of the Center for the Study of Religious Freedom and professor of interdisciplinary studies at Virginia Wesleyan College, Virginia.

Faith without certainty: liberal theology in the 21st century (2005)

Robinson, John T.

English New Testament scholar, Bishop of Woolwich

Honest to God (1963) In his controversial book, called Christians to view God as the “Ground of Being” rather than as a supernatural being.

(see additional material below)

Spong, John Shelby

Jesus for the non-religious (2007)

“His (Jesus’) real humanity came to be viewed as the vehicle through which God entered the life of this world. The word “God”, however, is a human word and it conveys a particular meaning. Human words do not describe reality outside human experience. The word “God” does not exist outside the human use of that word....must get beyond the traditional theistic definition of God that I now regard as both simplistic and naïve, to say nothing of being wrong...The theistic definition of God was never about God; it was always about human beings desperately in need of a coping system that would enable them to live with the anxieties of what it means to be human...Moving beyond theism, separating our understanding of Jesus from our theistic understanding of God, is not only a moral imperative; it is also the only pathway into the future of a loving Christianity...When an institution spends its time defending the indefensible, when it abdicates its responsibility to seek new forms in which to proclaim its essential message...when it extols unity over truth, then it is clearly time for either the death of that institution or a bold new direction...Divinity becomes and is the ultimate depth of humanity. God is not some supernatural power...the meaning and reality of God are found in the experience of human wholeness flowing in life-giving ways through all that we are. God is experienced when life is opened to transcendent otherness, when it is called beyond every barrier into an ever-expanding humanity.”

Stone, Jerome

Theologian, philosopher, faculty member of Meadville Lombard Theological School and professor of philosophy at Wm. Rainey Harper College, member of the Highlands Institute of American Religious and Philosophical Thought and the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science.

Stone has played an active in the development of religious naturalism.

The Minimalist Vision of Transcendence: A Naturalist Philosophy of Religion (1992)

“Power and goodness of the object of the religious attitude” American Journal of Theology and Philosophy (2004)

Religious Naturalism Today: The Rebirth of a Forgotten Alternative (2008)

(see additional material below)

Taussig, Hal

Minister and professor of New Testament at Union Theological Seminary, N.Y.

A new spiritual home: progressive Christianity at the grass roots (2006)

Progressive churches “help people think clearly and analytically...to help liberate people from old oppressive Christian ideologies...complementing the nurture of spiritual search with learning how to analyze religious documents (including the Bible) and faith expressions”. Progressive churches “do not defend orthodoxy. There are millions of searching Christians who know that traditional Christianity does not always work intellectually...seeking a thoughtful and open atmosphere that is not defensive”.

Taylor, Mark

Chair of the Department of Religion at Columbia University,

Taylor is widely known as fearlessly “oriented” to challenging orthodoxy’s determination to make things rigidly certain that are utterly unknowable.
After God (2007)

Windross, Tony.

Anglican minister in Norfolk, UK

The thoughtful guide to faith (2004)

“After all, the idea or image of God that we use is only a tool, only a means to an end: if seen as anything else, it has become an idol...In all other areas of human thought we allow (and indeed *expect*) development...Churches need to become places where people gather, not to reinforce their certainties about a being called ‘God’, but to share in the experience of exploring ways of trying to satisfy their mutual spiritual hunger.”

The danger of creeds is that they tempt people into thinking that the story is over, and all we’re required (indeed all we’re *allowed*) to do is keep replaying it, over and over again.

“Instead of limiting God to the anthropomorphic version...we need to expand it to include the non-theistic idea of God as the depth and centre of all Being, or the nonrealist idea of God as the personalized sum of our values – or even take seriously the orthodox idea the

God is Love...the important thing is not the label used...but whether the idea helps people who are currently disenfranchised from Christianity to take it seriously.”

Substantial excerpts from contemporary progressive theological works

1. Lloyd Geering – numerous works
2. Don Cupitt – numerous works
3. John T. Robinson’s *Honest to God* (1963)
4. Jerome Stone’s “Is God Emeritus? The rebirth of a forgotten alternative”
5. Ursula Goodenough’s *The sacred depths of nature* (1998)
6. Richard Holloway’s *Looking into the distance: the human search for meaning* (2004)
7. Michael McGhee - two articles

1. Lloyd Geering

▪ ***God in the new world* (1968)**

Systematically reworks numerous components of the Christian faith for ongoing relevance in new contexts. “It is clear that if the Christian message is going to be heard in today’s world, it must be related to that world.”

▪ ***Faith’s new age* (1980)**

An evolutionary intellectual history of the contemporary age and its influence on religious beliefs and practices, particularly concepts of a transcendent God figure – urges a rethinking of our humanity and community.

"Much modern atheism...is a protest, in the interests of truth, against false religious beliefs and superstitious practices...."

Urges the development of “a worldview that is in agreement with all the knowledge that humankind gathers. But the case is not made by appealing to "faith," or by threatening hell and damnation; no, the case is made with clear-eyed logical views of the future grounded in a deep understanding of the history of the religious institutions of the world and a profound understanding of the human's need for a sense of meaning.”

“People must re-learn what it means 'to live by faith alone'...without the divine and other supernatural props thought to exist in the past. There are no divinely revealed truths... no absolute and solid-rock certainties. The throne of heaven is empty. Indeed there is no heaven. This life is all there is. Moreover, with regard to the future of human existence on this planet, humans are now required to play the role they once attributed to an external deity. Perhaps if more recognized our situation for what it is, we'd be better stewards of the earth and each other.”

- **“The search for a ‘World Theology’ in a radically new age” in the *Journal for the Study of Religion*, vol. 1, no. 1 (March 1988): 3-20**

Theology and Christian truth claims

- ‘theology’ meaning the study of that dimension of human existence by which our ultimate concern for meaning and purpose leads us to an awareness of truth, beauty, goodness and justice” and ‘world’ to emphasize that an adequate theology must “take fully into account not only all that we know about the physical world but also the testimony of all human experience of what is ultimate in all its bewildering diversity...no two people live in exactly the same world...and our worlds change and expand all through one’s life.”
- the “rational study of the highest thoughts and aspirations of which we humans are capable, namely, the nature and purpose of the cosmos and of our place in it”
- ‘world theology, or, if you prefer, growth in human self-understanding on a global scale has become a very urgent issue.” p. 334
- we need a global theology “not limited to one cultural stream...not interpreted in terms too narrow, too Western (Christian chauvinism)
- “seeds” of a world theology “are to be found wherever humans reflected on the nature of human existence.” p. 319

Purpose of religion

A discussion of religious symbols is basically an exercise in human self-understanding... the goal of every religious aspiration is for us to become human beings who reach wholeness and complete maturity.” p. 325

Christian truth claims

“Acceptance of the validity of religious experience outside of Christianity will inevitably call for radical re-assessment of Christian claims.” Quotes professor of religious studies at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University, Tom Driver in *Christ in a changing world*: it is

“ethically indefensible in the kind of world in which we live today to continue to proclaim Christ as the norm, the absolute centre, the one-for-all revelation.” p. 328

Faith

Faith more than just what someone’s cognitive beliefs happen to be.

- “It is the response of the total person, emotions, will and mind, to the demands of human existence.
- It is a way of saying ‘Yes’ to life... an attitude of trust which consists of a series of decisions to live and act in a certain way... a mode of existence.
- Quoting a Muslim definition quoted by theologian Cantwell Smith: ‘Faith is one’s existential engagement with what one knows to be true or good, obligatory. It is the committing of oneself to act in terms of what one recognises as cosmically valid.’...
- “...all religious traditions, including modern humanism...have in common...this activity of trustful response to life which we call faith.” p. 331

Beliefs

“None of the particular elements of any cumulative tradition...even the concept of ‘god’... can ever be final or absolute...there is no religious belief which is absolute...unchangeable... which transcends the historical process in which it came to be enunciated...for every one, as a construction of the human mind, consequently reflects human finiteness. To affirm that any one belief, concept or word is absolute or unchangeable, transcending the historical process and human limitations, is to fall into the ancient error of idolatry.” p. 332

▪ ***Tomorrow’s God: how we create our worlds (1994)***

An exposition of how human beings create meaning and how we must self-consciously create meaning in a global, post-traditional world with a focus on human agency and responsibility, stressing creative potential and the power of language to create...human structures.

Tomorrow’s god is found in everything that rises to self-awareness, in an eco-humanism, in a call to prophetically save the planet and all humanity, a god beyond god, beyond belief or non-belief, to a new global consciousness.

Beliefs

“Traditional religious answers to the basic questions of human existence no longer satisfy to the degree they once did...for an increasing number of thoughtful people”. He “draws upon the Christian heritage” for it “has shaped Western culture”, but because its beliefs were “constructed to suit a world that looked very different” from ours, he urges that a new vision emerge out of that culture, one that works for present day sensibilities and needs.

God and human construction

“Traditionally it was assumed that the human species was created by God. Now it appears that the world in which we humans actually ‘live and move and have our being’, far from having

been created by a supreme divine being, is largely of our own making...the very concept of God was itself created by the human species.” p. 3

“Language is a human creation...the medium in which we live and create meaning...everything dependent on language is also human in origin and form. It means that the Bible is a human product, the Qur’an is a human product, that anything claiming to be the ‘word of God’ is a human product...that such basic concepts as truth, meaning, purpose, extremely important though they are, have been created by humans...even the word ‘God’ is of human origin...the words with which we try to explain the meaning of ‘God’ are also words” p. 21

“we are much more aware of our subjective role in constructing our world. We are much more aware of how our understanding of reality changes in the course of a lifetime....we are becoming increasingly aware of the need to keep re-appraising the way we understand the context in which we live. This means that we face the need continually to reconstruct our world...with words and stories. p. 46

God

“If we choose to speak of God, we shall be using this term to focus on all that we supremely value and on the goals which make human existence meaningful and worthwhile...” p. 194

- **“Faith and doubt on the margins” Paper presented to the Sea of Faith Network (NZ) Conference, 4 October 1997**

The word ‘God’

“God is a symbolic word...it has no external referent which is open to public confirmation. The word ‘God’ has become a functional term whose content depends on what we (subjectively) put into it, and this process...had its beginnings in the bible, where the prophets denied the objective reality of the gods but retained the word ‘God’ for that to which Israel should give its allegiance...God is not a word which has ever had one fixed meaning for all people.” p. 115

“Whether any of us continues to use the word god or now has now become a matter of personal choice...There is no necessity for us to use the word ‘god’. It is not even essential for us to use it in order to talk about faith. If we do use the word, we open ourselves to misunderstanding and confusion...It certainly does not mean for me what it meant for the ancients, including even Jesus of Nazareth...or what it means for the traditional theists of today. I do not believe, for example, that the word is the name of a spiritual being who planned and created this universe and who keeps it in his control.” p. 117

Creating meaning

“It is my belief that there is no ultimate meaning or purpose permeating this universe, amazing and mysterious though it is. The universe just is as it is. If we want to find any meaning within

the short time any of us is here, we have to create that meaning for ourselves. And we create the meaning of our lives by the way we live.” p. 117

- **“Christianity minus theism” Paper presented to the Sea of Faith Network (NZ) Conference, 7 October 2000**

Reforming Christianity: the baby and the bathwater

“Through church history people have attempted to reform the church. Their critics have warned that they are throwing out the baby with the bath water. That is a misleading metaphor. Christianity has no permanent and absolute essence. There is no ‘baby’: there is only the bath water, or what is preferably called the ongoing cultural stream, broadly known as Judeo-Christian. Two of the chief doctrines which are often regarded as the *sine qua non* of Christianity are the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation.”

The Trinity

“Theism (belief in one God) was radically modified by the incorporation of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation...The doctrine of the Holy Trinity...is no more than a humanly devised formula to safeguard certain very important areas of Christian experience which were thought to be beyond human understanding:

- the rejection of the gods as supreme beings in favour of the one God they worshipped who was related to the world and human history
- the influence of the man Jesus of Nazareth
- the experience of vitality in the fellowship of the new church, the Holy Spirit

This solution was arrived at only after bitter debate...many solutions were offered which seemed to make a lot more sense than their final solution... the doctrine ...was not adopted unanimously and unity was achieved only by casting out of the church those who disagreed...Was it really intended to make sense? Was it not primarily intended to reconcile warring parties in the church by finding some verbal compromise which would be accepted by the majority?”

“from the Enlightenment [onwards], as more and more people gained the freedom to think for themselves, they faced a dilemma. Either they simply repeated the traditional creeds—including the doctrine of the trinity—and pretended they understood it, or they thought for themselves and fell into one of the ancient heresies.” p. 151

The incarnation

“The doctrine of the incarnation evolved by a series of steps which developed...the process can even be documented within the New Testament” – the concept developed from Messiah, to Son of God, to Lord, to Saviour, to Logos or Word of God, to God and creator, to the human enfleshment of God (incarnation)...Where was this process of raising Jesus to divine status taking place? It was not a cosmic event. It was taking place in the minds of Christians...a human construction.” p. 154

“From our vantage point in the modern world we are in a better position to appreciate the fact that these doctrines were constructed by human minds; they were not divinely revealed. Indeed everything which has been claimed to be divinely revealed is in fact of human origin.” p. 155

▪ **“The secular trinity” in *The once and future faith* (2001)**

“As the primitive Christians looked into the future with faith based on their current experience, they expressed the substance of their faith...in the form of the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We in turn must draw on our basic experiences of reality to express our faith for the future...This hope rests upon putting our faith in the secular trinity of the world, humanity, and global consciousness.” p. 49

▪ ***Christianity without God* (2002)**

Geering poses the question as to whether or not Christianity can continue without belief in God and notes that it may appear absurd to even ask it, for many assume it is the very foundation. To answer the question, he examines the meaning of Christianity and of God to determine if a non-theistic Christianity is possible and what it can look like. He acknowledges that official creeds present belief in God as essential, but adds that definitions vary greatly.

“...the word ‘God’ is a human invention we have inherited from the past...” p. 4

Although the language we use to express all our beliefs are humanly invented, we are still free to determine which ideas and doctrines seem to truly describe the nature of reality. “To be believed, such concepts must be able to win our conviction by their own inherent meaning...and can no longer be defended on the grounds that they...have been revealed by some supernatural source.” p. 7

The Bible as authority

“through the centuries Christians came increasingly to view the Bible as the depository of divinely revealed knowledge...judged to be wholly true...and even more liberal Christians still tend to depend ultimately on the Bible in making final pronouncements on matters of doctrine and ethics.” It is a valuable historical and religious resource, but “what the Bible does *not* do is to provide for all time an authoritative account of what humans should believe and do. In particular, the Bible does not provide tangible evidence of the existence of God, or infallible knowledge about the divine nature and will...it always has been, and still remains, a set of human documents...written by humans and reflects the limited knowledge, as well as the common assumptions and prejudices” of its cultural contexts. p. 10

Doctrine, claims for truth

“Religious claims and theological statements...can never be more than human attempts to say something of ultimate importance...should never be identified with the ultimate truth, but must always remain open to questioning and review. Theology (or God-talk) is highly symbolic...and can be highly deceptive. It can give the appearance of being very profound; yet, on closer

examination, it may turn out to be gobbledygook, saying nothing very sensible or meaningful at all...clouding the issues rather than clarifying them...When we find the Emperor has no clothes on we should have the honesty to say so.” p. 15

Freedom and change

“Christianity is today in a more fluid state than it has been since the time of Christian origins. Nothing from its past is any more to be regarded as final and absolute. Everything is open to review and to change. We are free to explore whether or not the idea of God is any longer essential to Christianity...That does not mean that we are now about to discover the final truth of the matter...final and infallible truth.” All readers should examine carefully, weigh in light of their own experience, and decide for themselves. p. 16

Chapter 2: What is Christianity?

Faith contrasted with belief in the accumulated tradition

From theologian Wm. Cantwell Smith’s *The meaning and end of religion* (1964): made the distinction between:

- faith (“an inner experience universal to the human condition”)
- and “the form which faith has taken during the course of history; this he termed ‘cumulative tradition’ ...meaning the objective data (such as Holy Scriptures, creeds, doctrines, rituals, and social institutions...)”

This reification of Christianity, i.e., “the identification of faith with the Christian cumulative tradition”, the “error of equating faith with holding certain beliefs”, has “led to the widespread perception that Christian faith consists of holding a certain number of unchangeable doctrines and beliefs.”

Freedom of belief

We should be “left free from external constraints to formulate our beliefs in the way that best preserves our honesty and integrity...Integrity means wholeness...steadfastness, reliability...same Hebrew root as the word ‘Amen’...It abhors intellectual contradictions and moral inconsistency. To embrace openly beliefs which you may secretly doubt is thus the very opposite of faith, for it means that you are at cross-purposes with yourself.” p. 24-25

Faith

Geering quotes Smith on faith: “Faith is a quality of human living...serenity and courage and service; a quiet confidence and joy that enable one to feel at home in the universe, and to find meaning in the world and in one’s life, a meaning that is profound and ultimate, and is stable no matter what may happen to oneself at the level of immediate event.” (Smith, *Faith and belief*, 1979, p. 12)

Doubt, disbelief, atheism, the secular world

“The very act of discarding outworn beliefs, far from demonstrating a lack of faith, may...open the door for genuine faith to operate...Indeed the modern atheist who rejects the notion of God in

the interests of truth may be manifesting more faith than the traditional theist. The assertion that one needs to believe a particular creed or set of doctrines in order to have faith is an invitation not to faith but to credulity.” p. 26

“Doubt is not the enemy of faith but its ally, as the enemy of false beliefs. All beliefs should be continually subjected to doubt and critical examination and, when found to be false or inadequate, they should be discarded.” p. 26

“The modern secular world, with all its faults and problems, represents a new but legitimate stage in ...the logical continuation of...the Judeo-Christian cultural stream...[it] entails the end of much of the ossified structure known as Christian orthodoxy, but that should not be regarded as the *sine qua non* of the Christian stream.” Because no new organization has resulted, there is no clear sense of what is taking place, but “as people have increasingly questioned and abandoned specific Christian beliefs and practices of the past they have been slowly disengaging themselves from the organization of the church” (John Shelby Spong’s “the church’s alumni association”), and although not establishing a replacement for church, they have “unknowingly, been building a new kind of society—a global secular society.” The kind of faith described above is “not only possible but necessary” in the world as it is today. Whether what is coming to be can be called Christianity is a semantic issue, but it is “certainly in continuity” with it. What is not being brought forward is the “cosmic superstructure of the ‘Christian world’...created by ancient Christian imagination in the early centuries out of the raw material of the three-decker cosmology which prevailed in the ancient world.” p. 33

Chapter 3: Who made God?

(a “very simple sketch of how the understanding of God developed in the Western cultural tradition, drawing on both Jewish and Greek traditions”)

The word God as a non-personal noun

Points to biblical uses of the term in a symbolic way to refer to whatever values a person or nation regards as supreme, the values one lives by and the goals one aspires to – watch how someone lives his or her life and determine what appears to be his or her ultimate concern – that’s his or her sense of god in this interpretation. p. 43

Notes the church’s gradual movement away from its Jewish religious thought forms to blend with those of the philosophical Graeco-Roman culture—attempting a union of:

- the “immanent, this-worldly, history-controlling, and personal God of Israel”
- and the “transcendent, other-worldly, unchanging, and impersonal God of Plato”

a union which was “prevented from falling apart by the formulation of the symbolic doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation.” This resulted, ironically, in the accusation that the Christians were atheists because they rejected the gods of times past. p. 45

Chapter 4: Has God died and, if so why?

From the 17th century onwards, “the belief in divine revelation came increasingly under criticism and eventually was widely rejected. The traditional understanding of God became highly

vulnerable when it no longer possessed supernatural support. God had long been regarded as the proper name of a supernatural spiritual being; yet since god is neither visible nor tangible and his existence thus cannot be confirmed by any empirical method, divine revelation was absolutely necessary to establish both the reality and the attributes of God. Increasingly unable to appeal to revelation, people had no way of determining the meaning and content of the word “God” and its signification became increasingly uncertain...a wide range of meanings.” p. 53

Theism

“In theism, God is taken to be the name of the supernatural personal being believed to have created the world and to continue to have oversight (providence) of its affairs, intervening in them from time to time with miraculous events. Being personal, this God enters into personal relationships with humans, who are made in his image. This view of God goes far beyond what the so-called ‘proofs’ of the existence of God could ever establish” yet theists claim it represents what Christian faith has traditionally affirmed. So Christian orthodoxy still strongly affirms and defends it. Evangelical Christians use it as one of the essential tests of orthodoxy by asking, “Do you believe in a personal God?” p. 53

Atheism

“...by its etymology, is strictly speaking the rejection of theism...in the 18th century for a while it was used “chiefly to describe those who did not subscribe to the orthodox Christian teaching of God” while today, it often means the denial that the concept of ‘God’ “refers to any reality at all, whether a spiritual being or simply an idea.” p. 54

Deism

Leaders in the time of the Enlightenment “rejected the idea of miracles as divine or supernatural interventions into nature...prepared to abandon all the personal attributes ascribed to God...rejected theism...retained the word God as the name of the creator of the universe...[not] involved in the world in any personal way...an infinite intelligence behind the creation of the universe.” e.g., Einstein, Hawking, Paul Davies. p. 54

Pantheism:

Identifies God with all that exists; everything is God, one Being. e.g., Spinoza p. 54

Panentheism

An attempt to find a middle road between theism (overemphasized God’s transcendence and ‘otherness’) and pantheism (overemphasized God’s immanence), hence “everything is *in* God” but God is also “more than the universe”. e.g., Teilhard de Chardin, John T. Robinson, Paul Tillich, John Macquarrie, Matthew Fox, Marcus Borg (*The God we never knew*), John Shelby Spong. p. 54

The various terms “occurred chiefly because the word ‘God’ has no objective referent to which we can make the same sort of public appeal as, say, to the sun.” p. 55

Doctrine

From the Enlightenment onwards, as belief in divine revelation was increasingly questioned, “it was no longer sufficient for the church simply to proclaim the reality of God as true and to use its authority to enforce this belief by penalizing all who did not accept it. Even into the beginning of the twentieth century, the authority of the church and weight of peer pressure were sufficient to make people very reluctant to confess themselves openly to be atheists or even agnostics. They feared they would be ostracized as people beyond the pale.” p. 56

Attributing values to ‘god’

Despite the “declining confidence in divine revelation, God remained a convincing reality for the vast majority because of his ascribed qualities and functions...infinite power, wisdom and goodness, Maker and Preserver of all things...but the question arises—has God any being apart from the divine attributes? The only answer seems to be that the being of God consists of the divine attributes. God is the sum-total of the values which we humans attribute to God...If we take away the attributes, the term ‘God’ becomes an empty shell; it is rather like the algebraic ‘x’ waiting to be given a meaningful content from the cultural context...Only then does the common noun ‘god’ receive a more specific connotation and become God. In short, the content of the word God has to be supplied wholly from human culture.” p. 56-7

Ambiguous, vague language about God

Geering cites theologian Paul Tillich as working to “rescue God-talk by speaking of God as ‘being-itself’ or ‘ground of being’, meaning the “unconditional reality upon which all existing things depend for their being” treating ‘being’ as a verb not a noun. Although this “avoids the implication that God is the name of a supernatural being separate from the physical universe, it is far from clear just what ‘being itself’ is.” While Tillich saw ‘God’ as a symbolic term which thus required symbolic and metaphorical language, it “means that all talk of God is of necessity inadequate” and even Tillich “was forced in the end to such terms as ‘the God beyond God’, and later that ‘God’ referred symbolically to “whatever concerns us in an ultimate way...our ultimate concern.” p. 58

Non-realism regarding God

Notes that even Tillich was “reluctant to surrender the last element of objectivity in the concept of God, and turns to philosopher and radical theologian Don Cupitt, who in his 1981 work, *Taking leave of God*, speaks of God as ‘the mythical embodiment of all that one is concerned with in the spiritual life’” a way of speaking he refers to as a ‘non-realist’ view of God, using symbolic language to “refer to the highest ideals, values, and aspirations to which we feel obliged to give our allegiance.” p. 59

Non-realism, i.e., “having no objective reality” has a “long philosophical history”. It accepts the end of the God who was “imagined as a supernatural, personal being.” p. 59

Chapter 5: Why did Christians invent the Holy Trinity?

“It is doubtful if the doctrine of the Holy Trinity was ever meant to be understood...[it is] essentially a formula, invented by Christians of the first four or five centuries for the purpose of

affirming and safeguarding certain basic experiences...a triad of experiences...regarded as being of highest importance...which are brought together in close association:

- the experience of the inspiring grace of Jesus (mediated through the apostles)
- the experience of the love of God (inherited from the Jews)
- the experience of spiritual empowerment received in the Christian community.” p. 65-6

The early church developed theism into trinitarianism by means of the term ‘Godhead’ to incorporate all three experiences. It therefore refers “not so much a being as a quality—godhood, the quality of being divine.” Three experiences became three persons in one. p. 68

Chapter 6: How did Jesus become God?

Jesus as Christ

Jesus came to be considered as Christ (“the eternal Word of God”) as the beliefs about him developed and grew in the minds of his followers both during and after his lifetime. Scriptures refer to Jesus ‘becoming’ Christ at various points, including at his death, during his ministry, at his baptism, at his birth, and at creation.

“The Christian proclamation of Jesus as the Christ originated as a subjective evaluation of the role of Jesus by his followers. Later generations tended to interpret these subjective affirmations as if they had been objective events, thus giving them a public and historical character they had never possessed” p. 74

“What Christian tradition has too often treated as an objective description of Jesus as the Christ turns out to be a succession of subjective judgements illustrating the process by which successive generations came to perceive and worship him as the Christ. “

Jesus and the Trinity

“The doctrine of the Holy Trinity attempted to resolve the problem of how Jesus was related to God by declaring him to be the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity” and although it has “never been at all clear how Jesus could be ‘perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man’ at the same time” these words remain orthodox doctrine. p. 84-5

Theologian Gordon Kaufman noted that the term ‘Christ’ does not refer exclusively to Jesus but to a “new order of relationships of humans to God and to one another in the early Christian community” and that applying it to only one individual is “not only paradoxical but unintelligible.” p. 94

“The Incarnation signifies that we must now play on the earth the role which theism always assigned to an objective, supernatural god.” p. 95

Chapter 7: How did God become man?

Christianity does not depend on theism. Even at its origins, Christianity was already moving towards the ultimate rejection of pure theism in its doctrine of the incarnation. The final rejection of theism can be called humanism, secular humanism which “quite specifically denies reality to divine spiritual beings of any kind and as a consequence rejects ‘acts of God’, miracles, divine revelation, and all things supernatural, and acknowledges the human origin of values, concepts, and religions. The modern secular world has evolved out of Western Christian culture, from the Renaissance humanists, the Protestant Reformers, and the free-thinking Enlightenment figures. This evolution of thought is the natural result of “taking the doctrine of the incarnation to its logical conclusion.”

Chapter 8: Where did Christian humanism begin?

Describes four streams of Jewish thought in the Old Testament: the priestly, the prophetic, the royalist, and the Wisdom literature, which “showed little interest in the official religious practices and can legitimately be termed secular (meaning ‘this-worldly’) in its concerns.

Wisdom literature – focus on living

Sages composed, collected and preserved these observations on life, a tradition still in operation at the time of Christian beginnings, although not as revered as the other three types of writings.

p. 103-4 The Hebrew word for wisdom is associated with “understanding...political insight, knowledge of nature, discernment of right and wrong, even technical skill...quite pragmatic.” In the Wisdom tradition “the focus of attention was not, as in the Mosaic tradition, on God, the sacrifices, and the Temple; it was on how humans live their daily life and how to deal with its problems and frustrations.

Wisdom and God

They did occasionally refer to ‘God’ or ‘the Lord’, and even identified reverence for God as the beginning of Wisdom; but they introduced the divine names as if they were simply part of the universally accepted cultural vocabulary. It was as if the term ‘God’ had become for them a symbol for the cosmic order of the natural world and it was this which had to be respected and even revered... ‘God’ symbolized all that humans must learn to accept about the way the world is... Where the prophets or the psalmists might have spoken about the attributes of God, the sages preferred to talk about Wisdom, speaking as if it were a personal entity and a feminine one at that! The many different metaphors the sages applied to Wisdom imply that they were aware they were using poetic imagery...consciously objectifying the quality of wisdom, discernible in human behaviour. They spoke of Wisdom in much the same way as the Greeks later spoke of Logos (Reason); Wisdom had existed from the beginning of time, just as the Logos had. Like the Logos, Wisdom emanated from God and *was* God... The time would eventually come when it would be realized that what the sages were consciously doing with the concept of Wisdom could also explain the rise of the concept God...the sages believed people had to take full responsibility for their lives and to solve their own problems, first by making a proper study of life in the world, by learning what it could tell them, and, finally, by showing the necessary courage and determination to make the right responses: this was the way of Wisdom. Since most things in life could not be changed, they had to learn how to make the most of the choices which still lay open.” p. 108-110

Wisdom literature and Jesus

“Since the Wisdom stream may be said to have reached a peak in the sage-like teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, it can be legitimately claimed that humanistic or non-theistic Christianity is not only a genuine heir to the Wisdom stream of ancient Israel but also that it is firmly grounded in the Jesus tradition.” It is simply a matter of choice whether one uses the term ‘humanistic Christianity’, ‘non-theistic Christianity’, or simply ‘post-Christianity’” but it is important to see that the modern secular, humanist, post-Christian world flowed out of not only traditional Christianity but elements intrinsic to the whole Judeo-Christian tradition. “The modern secular and humanist world can legitimately be called ‘Christianity without God’”

Chapter 9: Was Jesus the wise man par excellence?

“Only with the advent of the modern, secular and humanist world and the realization that there is no Divine being in heaven to control human affairs and put all things right is the long neglected stream of wisdom tradition at last coming into its own.” p. 130

Chapter 10: Why Christianity must become non-theistic

Concepts of God: descriptive or functional

Distinguishes between:

- “thinking of God as a superhuman person regarded as having power over nature and human fortunes” which is a “descriptive definition”
- and taking ‘God’ to refer to the highest values which motivate us” which is a “functional definition”.

Theologian Gordon Kaufman suggested that the term ‘God’ could have a function in a secular word to denote ‘an ultimate point of reference’, so that ‘To believe in God is to commit oneself to a particular way of ordering one’s life and action. It is to devote oneself to working towards a fully humane world within the ecological restraints here on planet Earth, while standing in piety and awe before the profound mysteries of existence.’ (Kaufman, *In the face of mystery*, p. 347) If indeed that defines ‘belief in God’ few would wish to call themselves atheists...It must be conceded, however, that most people in the past assumed the descriptive definition and took the term ‘God’ to be the name of an objective, living, and thinking being” who created the world and still controls it, and with whom they communicated “on personal terms and expected to have their prayers answered.” p. 132

Free thinking

“Daring pioneers” of the past “claimed the right to think for themselves” earning the title, judged pejoratively then and still today, of free-thinkers, whose thought and public expression of those thoughts ushered in the modern world of emancipations, “where the authorities of the past came under challenge.”

“We cannot be fully human until we experience the widest possible range of choices, and learn to take full responsibility for our choices in both action and thought. This we cannot do if we are forced to accept the beliefs of others as our own beliefs or if we have to conform to the dictates of an external commanding voice.”

“Freedom from the commanding voice of a supposed divine authority is even more important now that we are in a position to realise that what our forbears took to be the divine voice, either in the Bible or in the church, turns out to be simply the voice of other humans like ourselves.” This includes Popes, bishops, and clergy, who are “human and fallible”, all church edicts which are “of human origin and open to error”, and the Bible, which “also can err, and frequently does, for it was composed by humans...it transmits the errors and prejudices of those who wrote it...to retain the traditional view of the Bible’s authority and inerrancy is to fall into the practice of idolatry.” p. 137

Authority

There is much of value to be learned in the Bible, but “the reason why theism is now seen to be dangerous is that it added to purely human words a dimension of absolute authority which they did not deserve...To express it simply and somewhat crudely, the continuance of theism enables people unconsciously to project their own beliefs on to a divine authority and then attempt to

impose them on their fellows, in the belief that in doing so they are simply obeying the divine imperative.” p. 137

Values

“ ‘God’ has been privatized...in the subjective consciousness of the devout individuals and traditional church gatherings...what has remained public are the values inherited from the Christian past, values which continue to lead to fresh emancipations and new human ideals; and it is these values which constitute ‘Christianity without God’.” Geering refers to philosopher and radical theologian Don Cupitt’s suggestion that “the secularization of religion has had the effect of sacralising life.” p. 143

Rituals and festivals

“In ‘Christianity without God’ there is still a place for rituals and festivals...to celebrate everything we have come to value in human existence, such as the importance of healthy human relationships and the rich inheritance of human culture...sharing a common meal round a table to celebrate the rich and sacred character of human fellowship...celebrate the natural processes of life...[remembering that] the great annual Christian festivals, most of which Christianity inherited from Judaism, all originated as festivals celebrating the seasons of nature.” P. 144

- *Coming back to earth: from gods, to God, to Gaia (2009)*

God

“If we continue to speak of God, we are pointing to the values, goals, and aspirations that motivate us to follow the path of faith...the personal attitude of trust and hope that we humans manifest as we both interpret the world in which we live and respond to its demands.” p. 1, 9

Secular world

“The emergence of the modern secular world is to be seen as the logical consequence of the doctrine of the incarnation and the legitimate continuation of the Judeo-Christian path of faith.”

“...we humans must live without the divine heavenly props thought to exist in the past...The cumulative tradition of each path of faith is a human creation...all religious concepts, such as the gods and God, are of human creation. The heavenly world was wholly a creation of the human imagination. p. 8-9

Jesus as the Son of God

“Jesus never claimed to be the Son of God.”

Values

“Values such as freedom, love, justice, and the pursuit of peace...now continue in the secular world but no longer need the support of divine authority. Their own inherent power to convince us of their worth haws replaced the sanctions of the now departing deity. Indeed, those people who love their fellows because they are convinced of the value of love show greater moral maturity...That is why this new cultural age has been called “humankind’s coming of age...must

learn how to practice love, justice, and peaceful co-existence because it recognizes their inherent value [not out of fear or for reward] p. 57

Heresy

“...but this also means that individuals are freer to choose their way of life or path of faith. That is why we have come to value diversity more than conformity. The conformity of belief and practice so dominant in the past made heresy the most heinous of sins. “Heresy” from a Greek word meaning “choice”, is used in the New Testament for a belief system of those who have the audacity to choose their own way of life rather than follow that of the majority.” p. 57-58

Doctrine and idolatry

Geering observes that the Judeo-Christian tradition has often “found itself so weighed down by its accumulating lore and mythology that it has had to jettison its excess baggage” and notes that the Protestant Reformers “abandoned a great deal of what had accumulated” and states that this next age “requires us to jettison a great deal more...including a post-mortem heaven and hell, a divine saviour, an objective personal deity, the doctrine of atonement, and the whole system of dogma that envelops them. These doctrines were once important as the expression of faith in a worldview where they were appropriate. That worldview has become obsolete, and in the modern world, these doctrines have become a hindrance to faith...Faith is not dependent on belief in a personal God...in common human experience faith is multi-faceted...that is why in various secular contexts we may be exhorted to put faith in ourselves, in our ideas, in other people, in the natural world. It is up to us to clarify for ourselves just what we most deeply revere and to recognize...that whatever we put our trust in becomes our God. We have to learn throughout life to distinguish between idols and the God we can truly trust. In the context of the modern worldview, the theistic God has become a superstitious and idolatrous object. p. 61

Worship

Stating that the future of the path of faith for Christianity is secular, Geering suggests that “far from being the enemy of Christianity, the truly secular life is the legitimate continuation of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The traditional worship of God has widened into the celebration of life.

Secular life and values

Faith is a matter of saying “Yes!” to life in all of its planetary complexity. Even while shedding many of Christianity’s past symbols and creedal formations, the secular path still honours the abiding values it has learned from its Christian origins. Geering names the concerns of the secular life as “the pursuit of truth, the practice of justice, and the nurture of compassion, freedom, and peace” and likens this to living “by faith, hope, and love.” p. 63

Definitions of religion

“A conscientious concern for what really matters.” Quotes theologian W. Cantwell Smith showing that only in modern times did it come to refer to a “specific set of beliefs and practices, particularly with a supernatural dimension...it did not originally refer to any particular set of

beliefs at all, but to the degree of commitment or devotion that people displayed towards their most important interests.” And Tillich: “the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern”. p. 123

- *Reimagining God: the faith journey of a modern heretic (2014)*

Chapter 10: Idolatry in the church

The Bible and authority

“Though the idolising of the Bible...is most clearly to be observed in fundamentalists or biblical literalists, it is by no means absent from the church in general, though there it often takes a more subtle form. The church has shown a great reluctance to acknowledge openly that the Bible, being of human authorship, reflects human fallibility...the church must acknowledge that in some matters the Bible is wrong and has become a blind guide; and this applies not only to questions of historical evidence but even more seriously to vital issues in religion and ethics.”

p. 157

Jesus and Christ

Contrasts the historical Jewish Jesus of Nazareth with the divine figure of the Christ of faith. It is probable that there was such a person in history but emphasizes that most New Testament scholars feel there can be no definitive biography of Jesus because “we lack the necessary historical data...except in faintest outline, for the extant traces of him very soon became hidden behind the biblical portraits of the Christ of faith, whose image was “conceived and developed in the collective mind” of the early Christians, who raised Jesus to divine status – “the divine Son of God, Saviour of the world, and, eventually, the second Person of the Holy Trinity.”

“Christians may reasonably continue to draw encouragement and inspiration from the Christ of faith, provided they acknowledge this personification to be a figure of vivid symbolic imagery...for it is not the historical Jesus who stands at the centre of the Christian tradition, but the Christ figure of the Bible, for this latter figure and the symbolic poetic imagery that goes with it constitute the spiritual motivation of the Christian tradition.” p. 162-3

Theologian Gordon Kaufman: “through most of Christian history the image of Christ was reified to the point of idolatry” and the “deification of Jesus by which he became the Christ-symbol can now be seen to be open to the charge of idolatry. Today’s Progressive Christian theologians also recognise this error and call it ‘Jesusolatry’.” Kaufman also points out that early Jews and Muslims criticized the divinizing of Jesus into Christ as idolatry, but adds that “to this day Christians have seldom acknowledged this quite proper theological critique of their reified use of the central religious symbols.” Geering adds that we can only avoid the charge of idolatry if when we use the Christ-symbol we acknowledge it as a symbolic image p. 163

God, symbol, atheism

“All God-talk is symbolic and is expressed in evaluative language, asserting what an individual or community believes to be of greatest value of meaning to them...an abstract term, a concept, a symbol; and we become guilty of idolatry if we treat it as the personal name of some objective (albeit spiritual?) being.” p. 164

“...the twentieth century has been marked in the Western world by widespread disbelief in the traditional understanding of God. The modern atheist who protests that no supernatural being called God actually exists is wholly justified. To affirm the existence of an objective God is to be guilty of idolatry. Those who are most convinced they actually know the mind and will of this supposed divine person open themselves to the charge that they have, however unwittingly, projected their own ideas and aspirations on to that God and then claimed divine authority for what they themselves wish to affirm and to do.” p. 165

Tom Driver (professor of religious studies at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University): “the church has been very slow to perceive that it cannot survive the revolution in modern conscience while holding on to the notion of God as an absolute, extraneous authority, much less the Bible as the expression of that authority.” p. 165

Turning back to orthodoxy

“...the Christian churches of today face an unknown future, and are strongly tempted to turn back to past tradition and raise up Christian orthodoxy and its various symbolic terms into objective idols that must be preserved and worshipped at all cost in the hope that they will bring deliverance...Only when the church and its theologians are prepared to acknowledge and abandon their own idols are they in a position to point out the idols in society.

Drawing on our common humanity

How to denounce the idols and what criteria can be used “if God is no more than a symbol? Neither divine revelation nor some high moral ground of special privilege will do.” The strongest appeal comes from “our common humanity”, which is still the “experience of some kind of voice, but an inner voice rather than a supernatural one. Some still refer to that voice as God’s; others may prefer to call it conscience, human reason, or common sense.” Geering isn’t sure which or if any term will be accepted by all, but suggests that this should be expected considering the rapid changes in all aspects of life. We must “draw from whatever cultural heritage has shaped us the honesty and courage to acknowledge our common humanity.” and talk with each other respectfully and with acknowledgement “the fallibility common to us all” and use our rational abilities to “critically examine the things and ideas we value most highly to discover where we may be in danger of worshipping idols of our own making.” p. 167

Chapter 11: Ethics without God

Since we are dependent on nature for our survival and flourishing, and that dependence incurs duties, we need knowledge and understanding, but not “from out of the blue as a new set of commandments. Rather it is we who will have to enunciate them...and develop an attitude toward the world much like the religious attitudes of the long past, “awe, worship, and the sense of the holy...pause, ponder, and stand in awe of this star-clad universe; marvel at the evolving

diversity of life on this planet; value everything on which our common life depends; appreciate the total cultural legacy we have received from our pioneering forbears; and devote ourselves in a self-sacrificial way to the responsibility now laid upon us all for the future of our species and of all planetary life.” He quotes his own translation of a saying from the Old Testament by Ecclesiastes: “Stand in awe of Nature and do what it requires of you, for this is the whole duty of humankind.” p. 184

Chapter 12: Christianity without Christ

Jesus was a teacher and sage who gave his followers principles for living, not “a body of eternally fixed doctrine that he expected people to believe. Unfortunately, Christianity has long been presented as the latter, with the result that Christians have often referred to themselves as ‘believers’ and have:

- jealously guarded what they called *orthodoxy*, a term that means ‘the body of correct beliefs’”
- often to the neglect of ‘*orthopraxy*’ which means correct action. p. 186

Christianity began as a form of orthopraxy, with “the emphasis on what to do rather than on what to believe”, with early writings giving not a creed but manuals for practice, “how to walk the Way that leads to Life”, a type of Jewish orthopraxy.

“The human Jesus became increasingly transformed into the divine, supernatural figure of Christ. As a result, the Way became replaced by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and Christian orthodoxy took the place of Jewish orthopraxy.” The focus shifted from Jesus as teacher of the Way of life, to Jesus as the embodiment of all that he taught, “*he* became the Way—the Way to God—to be acknowledged as the Messiah (Christ).”

The purpose of the church is not to convert people to Christian belief in Jesus Christ as their Saviour, nor to claim that “God has saved us through the sacrifice of his Son” but to carry on the teachings of Jesus, of the Way of love for one another. p. 201

Chapter 13: Tomorrow’s spirituality

The Holy Spirit

The word spirit and its derivatives “reflect the dualistic world-view” of the ancient and medieval worlds, dividing reality into the physical and the spiritual realms, with humans living in both, temporal and eternal. Christians speak of God as spirit and refer to the ‘power of the Holy Spirit.’ But “spirit has no substance at all...a purely abstract term that has no external referent...a frozen metaphor from a now obsolete worldview, and its only possible meaning is a metaphorical or symbolic one...If we continue to use such terms as spirit and spirituality, we must first make clear what we mean by them. Semantic issues have increasingly become a problem with many religious terms.” p. 208

Spirit and values

“...the word spirit is useful to refer to a special kind of vitality and/or to the highest qualities of personal existence...a dimension or aspect of human existence that is over and above emotion,

volition and cognition, though it contains and depends upon all three...closely associated with the highest values or qualities we associate with personhood...spiritual qualities mentioned in Galatians as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...qualities that cannot be labelled intellectual and cannot even be called moral, though some of them certainly have moral implications"...some for our inward personal life and others for our personal relationships. p. 209

Spirit and relationship

Referring to the work of Martin Buber, who "considered it a mistake to think of spirit as some intangible thing within us" but rather what is around and between us, treated metaphorically. "He was referring to that 'indefinable something' that brings cohesion and quality to the life of a society as 'relation'; nurtured by the way we relate to one another at a personal level." p. 211

Earthly, human spirituality

"Whereas the traditional spirituality of Christianity was divine, heavenly and otherworldly in character, tomorrow's spirituality must be essentially human, earthly and this-worldly...must evolve out of the past and present...distinguishing between what has to be discarded and what can be salvaged and adapted for use tomorrow...[with] focus on the nurture of the human condition, both individual and social, for we become human only through our relation with other humans...no one starts from scratch." p. 212

Chapter 13: Spirituality for an ecological age

"We are now entering a post-Christian era. We may call it the Global Era" in which we must learn to live together in unity and peace as one global family...but also in harmony with the natural forces of the planet...an Ecological Age."

"The religious or spiritual dimension of global culture, if it comes at all, will be natural and not supernatural. It will be humanistic, first because it will need to serve all humanity, and secondly because it will be humanly based and will evolve out of the many cultures which have preceded it...including the Judeo-Christian past...and nature religions." p. 222

"...the absolute importance of spirituality even when understood in naturalistic terms and acknowledged as a human creation." p. 223

"...such values as compassion, goodwill and love, long dominant in Christianity, are by no means as unique as was thought." p. 231

"Life is so precious and the evolutionary universe so mysterious that these should be more than enough to induce in us that sense of awe and joyful gratitude which played such a role in past religious experience."

2. Don Cupitt

- **Religion without supernaturalism (1988) in Radical Theology: selected essays (2006)**

(speaking while still a priest in the Church of England)

“The problem is that Christian worship, theology and institutions are still locked into a very ancient, once universal, type of religious ideology. According to this the whole visible world...is related to an invisible spirit-world...they define reality...have all power and authority...know everything...and “their influence is ubiquitous, but unseen.” p. 17

“The Church is still completely controlled by the clerical Establishment. Their personal authority and power depend upon objective and God-guaranteed credentials. So they have to take a realist or objective view of Christian language...have their visible proofs of their own authority...But liberal theology has always argued for inward, spiritual, symbolic and ethical interpretations, which have the side-effect of weakening clerical power. So the liberal theologian has got to be repudiated...So liberal theology fails because it must always get shipwrecked on the Rock which is Peter, that is, the interest of the professional clerical Establishment. For the clerics, truth is always ‘high’...a high doctrine is a doctrine that magnifies the cosmic importance of the clergy, the sacraments, redemption, the Church, or whatever...overtones of cosmic feudalism and supernatural backing for priestly authority...As for thinking laypeople, most of them voted with their feet long ago. Today the argument has moved on. Liberal theology belongs to the nineteenth century. It is too late to attempt to arrange a new concordat between our present culture and an appropriately revised Christianity...we are finding that traditional concepts and idioms are breaking up and becoming unintelligible to us year by year. Only a few years ago we still thought we could understand them, but now they are disintegrating. The words are becoming hollow even as we use them.” p. 20

Rethinking religion (1992)

- “In this new age, God is seen, as it were, as disappearing into people. His creativity becomes ours. God becomes incarnate in our fellow human beings and then distributes himself as Spirit in human relationships...the possibility opens before us of a beliefless but creative Spirit-Christianity...Human beings will become fully liberated when they see that they themselves are responsible for their own religious beliefs and for their values...From the past we have inherited an abundance of religious symbols, religious myths, and religious practices. We have got to change them all into new shapes and make new things for the future...and we must do this by a kind of unchaperoned, art-like reinventing of our own tradition.” p. 16

- ***After all: religion without alienation (1994)***

Chapter 1: The emergence of post-Christianity

Doctrine and ministers

“...the grand dogmas of historic ecclesiastical Christianity are not strictly scriptural...Western Christianity’s great doctrinal epic is a strange and splendid *midrash*, a work of art, a very detailed romance loosely based upon the Bible...very obscure to us, because it reflects lost ways of thinking.”

“The doctrines of the Trinity and incarnation...have become so opaque that no theologian since the Enlightenment has been able to spell out what they are supposed to mean in a way that is intellectually coherent, morally acceptable, and moderately plausible, whilst at the same time being acceptable to the faithful as an articulation of what they believe themselves to believe.”

This understanding of theology is at least a century old and is taught at the start of theological education. “Because they wish to retain a shred of intellectual credibility, the churches still require ministerial candidates to study some theology, but advise them that...[it] will test their faith. It will indeed, and after they are ordained, they quickly and prudently forget all about theology. Having learned its dangers, they are now inoculated for life...”

Since the 1840’s, it is widely agreed that faith is non-rational—“a touch of irrationality lends spice to faith”—so one is to believe because of duty and on the authority of ... “tradition, or the Bible, or on the basis of personal ‘experience’, and one is most wary of permitting mere secular reason to erode away something so precious.” p. 18

“The church demonstrates its own numinous power by its ability to make us believe absurdities.”

Post-Christian world

- “Today’s post-Christianity...is being experienced as a religious liberation. Since the mid-19th century, people who have outgrown ecclesiastical Christianity have tended to think of themselves as ‘lapsed’, as ‘agnostics’ or ‘humanists’...and have sounded as if they feel themselves diminished...but today’s post-Christianity sees no reason [for] pessimistic terms”, but rather sees that “traditional ecclesiastical Christianity has now “completed its historical task, which always was in the end to go beyond itself, exceed itself and become something greater than itself.”
- “...in post-Christianity...there are no longer two worlds but only one—*this* world; and there is no longer an objective God, but only a...merging together of the sacred and the profane. Everything that lives is holy.” p. 23
- “Christianity contains within itself an impulse to self-criticism which has led it since the Enlightenment progressively to demythologize itself.” p. 27

Language

- “Today the language of fundamentalism is ugly and empty ranting, and the language of liberal religion is soothing but empty waffle...when the tradition has finally collapsed, no amount of repair-work can revive it. You must reimagine and redevelop the whole site...we have to rethink everything if we are to find a style of religious thinking that makes sense...sketching a view of the world and the human condition that a reasonable person might currently hold. Somebody needs to try to say what it might be ‘to see life steadily and to see it whole’ today” p. 33-35

Reforming Christianity (2001)

Chapter 9: The problem of self-transcendence

Requiring belief in the creeds

- “Church Christianity attaches the most importance to correct creedal belief. It is still instinctively felt both within the churches and outside them that a person who seriously impugns major items of belief should be swiftly and unceremoniously dumped. Yet at the same time it has always been known in the church that creedal belief is only an imperfect and transitional state of mind.” p. 59

Chapter 10: Is reformation possible?

Problems for conservatives and liberals (writing from within the Church of England)

- “...very large areas of standard Christian doctrine have already been tacitly abandoned even by the most aggressively orthodox...conservatives... will not openly admit that an older and harsher vision of the world has passed away, leaving a great deal of our traditional religious language virtually unusable. In order to gain a precious political advantage over the liberals, the conservatives claim to adhere to traditional doctrine in full; but the truth is that they *tacitly* modify traditional doctrine almost as much as the liberals do.”
- “Unfortunately, the liberal is not without problems of his own. Aware that with massive changes in our world view the old technical vocabulary of religion no longer has clear meaning, the liberal tries to translate it all into contemporary language. But the modern world being what it is, the words he is adopting do not already have established religious overtones and uses, and the completed translation inevitably fails to state a distinct position in clear language. Notoriously, liberals tend to find themselves accused of being woolly or vague.” p. 69
- “...exactly what [some liberal theologians and clergy are] saying remains hard to tell...”

The pressure to conform

- Because of their ecclesiastical position, their “language is required to be, and is taken to be, edifying and non-technical...language which simultaneously suggests to some of his audience that he is making a radical break with tradition, and to others of his audience that the old realities remain reassuringly in place after all.” The expectations of those listening “exert an immensely strong pressure upon the speaker, to a degree that cannot be overemphasized. But the consequence is that someone who must speak and be heard mainly in a church context is not quite *allowed* to say anything too clear or definite.” p. 70
- The difficulties and lack of success of attempts to reform Christianity from a position within the church are well known. “The political constraints upon his own use of language must make a Bishop sound vague, and as if what he is saying is designed to mean one thing to one section of his audience and another thing to another. He must speak as he does in order to get a hearing from the Church audience which is his constituency – an audience which is abnormally quick to take offence.”
- “It requires Church leaders always to give ‘a strong lead’—which means to reassure...and fulfil all its expectations and defer to all its most irrational prejudices. If he ever says anything interesting and genuinely challenging to them, they will react with

bewildered outrage, and his colleagues will instantly desert him (as happened with John Robinson and others). If necessary they will publicly unite against him (as has happened with Bishop John Spong)...an 'honest bishop' cannot win...in the short term he may gain notoriety...but his long-term failure is certain because of the way the group dynamics of the church operates...If a bishop were to say plainly in public that doctrinal statements are not to be taken too 'literally' he would at once be understood to be saying that [they] are just not true, and all hell would break loose. p. 71

- Liberal theologians have done much to reform Christianity in its more negative requirements, but they have “so far had little success in their project. They have taken archaic, rather ugly but undeniably potent traditional religious ideas and have tried to translate them into a more up-to-date and politically correct vocabulary – but with what result? Alas, the modern translation almost always looks weak...I fear that we are already in an epoch when any and every attempted spelling out of a system of religious doctrine sounds like nonsense. One struggles to read the texts, but finds that they are incomprehensible to an outsider. The insiders are people so desperate to feel that they belong to the group and so hungry for religion that they read these texts eagerly and believe that they understand them. They will seize upon and quote phrases as passwords, so as to create an illusion of comfortable familiarity and belonging. But it's all gobbledygook: and that is increasingly the position with all theological writing, whether Christian or not. It's all beginning to sound like the internal jargon of a cult, jargon intelligible only to insiders...a post-dogmatic... type of religion is now the only live option.” p. 73

Chapter 11: Is reformation possible? II

- “...if the church has a policy of requiring men and women in training for the ministry to study theology, and if those people are learning from their studies that the most basic Christian doctrines can no longer be defended as being scriptural, or even as consistent with scripture, then the church, for the sake of everyone's mental health and its own long-term well-being, ought not to go on any longer requiring its officers to believe the unbelievable and defend the indefensible. Doctrinal revision is urgently necessary just on biblical critical grounds.” p. 76
- Conservatives in the church may respond that God has revealed the truth and so it cannot be changed, yet it is clear now that “dogma has a history, and a very human history...formulated and approved each item of orthodox doctrine, and some of the supporting arguments that looked good to them in the 4th and 5th centuries just don't look so good to us today. What earlier humans made, later humans may reappraise and redesign, or even discard. Certainly it is wrong to expect young people to study and to pass examinations in the history of Christian doctrine, and then to spend their whole lives preaching doctrine as if it fell from the sky ready-made and may never be rethought or even questioned.” p. 76
- “To liberal theologians it seems absurd that the Church should needlessly handicap itself and damage its own members by clinging to irrational and morally objectionable ideas. They think that reformation by revising and updating the Church's teaching and practice

is obviously both easy and necessary. So they put forward their proposals—and every time there is a chorus of public indignation and outrage ...but liberal theology has made no progress...” p. 76

▪ ***Is nothing sacred? The non-realist philosophy of religion* (2002)**

Chapter 6: The human condition

- “to see religion, not as giving us supplementary information about another realm of being, but as a practice that strives to reconcile and integrate our way of life and our world-view. It is a beliefless religion.” p. 85

Chapter 7: Spirituality, old and new

- “It is very difficult to use any religious vocabulary today without invoking a history of extreme two-worlds dualism that one must hasten to disclaim. Most religious liberals today try to go on using the traditional religious vocabulary, while at the same time repudiating the old cosmological beliefs and valuations that used to give that vocabulary meaning. It is no wonder that we end up sounding vague, woolly, and confused.” p. 90
- “Classical spiritualities...in Christianity above all, but also in other faiths—were extremely world-denying, and made a sharp distinction between the present very bad outward and passing appearance of things, and the blessed inner and eternal reality of things that would stand forth at the end of time...[attempted] to deny this world and with it the body, the entire secular realm, the passions, sex, and time...to prepare for life in the world to come...in this context we can understand why so much of the old vocabulary has become empty and barely usable. The most you can do with it is to create a brief shock-effect by the way you reverse it...It’s a trick that can be played only once; after that, we have to start changing our vocabulary.” p. 92
- “We should see religious language and myth as utopian visions, not of a second world to be entered into after death, but of a different way this world might be. Religion is halfway between ethics and art; indeed, it is a sort of performance art.” p. 97
- Spirituality and questions of doctrine, religious meaning, and truth “need to be judged, not dogmatically, but pragmatically: religious teachings and practices should be appraised simply in terms of the kind of person and kind of world they tend in practice to produce.” p. 97

Chapter 8: The radical Christian worldview

- “I am a post-dogmatic believer. None of the old dogmas are true anymore. The old [philosophically] realistic metaphysics of God is dead, and I certainly do not believe in *that* God any longer...But the death of God has in effect *scattered* the divine across the human life-world, sacralising many aspects of our experience. I have gained more than I have lost, because I now find the Holy in all that was once thought to be *merely* human, *merely* relative, and (above all) *merely* transient. The death of God makes *everything* holy...I like religious immanence, and a widely scattered sacred. It makes possible a much more varied and richer piety, and it is quite free from the hysterical absolutism of the orthodox.” p. 101

▪ ***The old creed and the new (2006)***

If all of religion, its beliefs and traditions and practices were to “disappear or were somehow completely forgotten”, and we had to begin from scratch, “unguided by tradition”, would we automatically invent something like religion? “...how many of our current religious beliefs would we recreate, and do so because the way things are would still suggest to us that those beliefs are true, and that they obviously have a part to play in our lives?” particularly belief in God, e.g., from the Apostles’ Creed: ‘I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord...and in the Holy Ghost...’ p. 1-4

Can we today “see any of our received religious beliefs as being ‘natural’ to us.” p. 1

Chapter 23: Towards a critique of religious thought

- “We need to redefine religion. Religion is the attempt of the whole person to find, to feel, and to live out an appropriate response to the perceived truth of the human condition. The only difference between philosophy and religion is that philosophical enquiry is more speculative or theoretical, whereas religious thought is intensely involved and practical.” p. 141

▪ ***Radical theology: selected essays (2006)***

Introduction

“...we live amidst an acute crisis of faith. Most of traditional Christian belief is no longer tenable; we just don’t have sufficient reason to think it true...the classical arguments for God’s existence do not stand up, the traditional ideas about the authority of the Bible have broken down, and most of classical Christian doctrine, from the Fall of Man to the Blessed Trinity, is simply *not* ‘scriptural’, in the sense usually claimed. Even in its own day and on its own terms, much of it was mistaken, or at least ill-made. Today there is an increasingly wide gap between the world-view that is inculcated by church services and the world-view that we all operate with in everyday life. *But we all know this already!* We’ve known it for many generations, and merely pointing it out in a very loud voice will not change anything at all. It will not persuade church leaders to budge one inch. And in any case, what can *they* do? They have far less power than people suppose. They think they are doing pretty well if they merely succeed in keeping the peace within the church.”

Why are those few of us who do try to do something to purge, reform, and renew religion regarded as villains...? Two hundred years of critical theology have demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that all our religious belief-systems and institutions are human, with a human history. *We* created every bit of them, including all those ideas about revelation, about Holy Tradition and about dogmatic immutability. We created it all, so why can’t *we* reform and renew it all?

...the temptation to suppose that people will be interested in, and will want to *act upon*” a radical theology. Cupitt suggests that “They won’t—because the Church is not and perhaps never was chiefly for people who have a deep and serious intellectual interest in religion. On the contrary, the Church is for people who want to keep up comfortable old habits and associations, who want

a feeling of reassurance...and are happy to live by a ready-made Truth. They are content to go on slumbering peacefully.” p. 3

“...there is also a positive side...why I persist with theology...radical theology...written by people who have experienced the breakdown of popular, orthodox dogmatic faith...passed through a moment of violent discontinuity, and has struggled to remake or rediscover faith on the far side of the loss of faith...even though he has entirely lost the popular sort of faith.”

“The decline of popular (orthodox, traditional) faith since the Enlightenment has been caused by the spreading realization that we and we alone made it all: we humans have ourselves slowly evolved our own language, our own worldview, our own religions and moralities, and the whole of our own knowledge. None of it was supernaturally communicated to us from above: we made it all up. That simple proposition is now so blindingly obvious...so thoroughgoing ‘religious naturalism’ is unavoidable, and popular faith collapses. We are on our own...gradually one learns that conviction which one has struggled for and acquired oneself, the hard way, and then has gradually crystallized in debate with others, are far stronger and more valuable to us than any amount of traditional ready-made truth.” p. 4-5

▪ ***The fountain: a secular theology (2010)***

An attempt to combine a general account of the human situation with how we should learn to live, held together by a single unifying symbol, the Fountain.

From the introduction:

“I am wary of using the words God or Jesus. In fact, I am now very doubtful about both. In the case of God, there is the very strong association between the basically masculine, transcendent, legislating God of our ‘Abrahamic’ group of religions and the historic subjection of women: the transcendent lawgiver God *rules* over Nature and over the human soul...we need a purely immanent religious vision that can reconcile us to our own complete immersion in time and contingency, and to our own mortality...while also avoiding any excessive masculinism and transcendence.

As for Jesus, my first problem is that I find it hard now to call myself a Christian, because the word presupposes acceptance of the title ‘Christ’, or Messiah, which in its turn presupposes a complex supernatural theology of history that nobody should believe in nowadays...I greatly admire Jesus, but for his sake I must not give him any special supernatural status...he was an ordinary man who just happened to be an intensely committed and gifted ethical thinker and teacher...found and taught a very important and attractive way of life and path to happiness...but there may well have been other human beings who have made an independent discovery of Jesus’ ethical Way...So my updated version of Christianity...cannot make him structurally essential to its whole scheme of thought. As John Stuart Mill once sensibly put it, where Jesus was right and we can see that he was right, we can simply thank him and move on. We don’t need to keep him as an *authority*; indeed, his own doctrine forbids us to treat him as an authority...you must reject any and every kind of ethics of law because no *external* constraint upon your behaviour can ever make you a truly moral being. You must live from and by your own heart and you must go beyond ordinary ‘justice’.

A further difficulty about the name of Jesus is this: all our ancient faiths are infected by the old belief in verbal magic: ‘Ours is the One True Faith because we address the right God by the right name, using sacred passwords and powerful spells given exclusively to us by him’. Most radical theologies in the West since Hegel have recognized the need to give up *supernatural beliefs*, but...nobody...has sufficiently recognized the need to give up *the claim to possess the exclusive franchise*. I do give up that claim, which is why this is only *a* secular theology...it makes no non-rational claims and does successfully meet what is today our most pressing religious need; but it is *not* the One True Faith. The very notion of a single form of words that gets It All absolutely right is wrong, deeply wrong. Sadly, therefore, I have had to give up the name of Jesus, because it has for so long been claimed that he is the only Way to God and that the Church is entirely justified in setting up roadblocks...as we travel along the Way.”

3. John T. Robinson’s *Honest to God* (1963)

From the Preface

It is “increasingly difficult to know what the true defence of Christian truth requires” acknowledging that there would always likely be a majority who see it as solely a defence of traditional doctrine, a “firm reiteration, in fresh and intelligent language, of ‘the faith once delivered to the saints’.” He also acknowledges contemporary theologians’ “indispensable” work of reinterpreting doctrine and the value this has been for a “hungry following”.

What is needed is more than a “restating of traditional orthodoxy in modern terms...a much more radical recasting” that would affect “the most fundamental categories of our theology—of God, of the supernatural, and of religion itself. He resonated with those who urged that “we should do well to give up using the word ‘God’ for a generation, so impregnated has it become with a way of thinking we may have to discard if the Gospel is to signify anything”. He pointed to the “growing gulf between the traditional orthodox supernaturalism in which our Faith has been framed” and what people find meaningful today. He describes the line running right through himself, but admitted that “as time goes on I find there is less and less of me left, as it were, to the right of it,” as he often sympathizes with humanists’ “inability to accept the scheme of thought and mould of religion”, not because his commitment is waning, but he supports his rebellion against it and was “increasingly uncomfortable that ‘orthodoxy’ should be identified with it.”

He therefore pleads that those who believe that what is needed in the Church is a “a radical questioning of the established ‘religious frame’ should be accepted no less as genuine and, in the long run equally necessary, defenders of the Faith.” Yet he felt that probably “the gulf must grow wider before it is bridged and that there will be an increasing alienation, both within the ranks of the Church and outside it, between those whose basic recipe is the mixture as before (however revitalized) and those who feel compelled above all to be honest *wherever* it may lead.”

“What I have tried to say, in a tentative and exploratory way, may seem to be radical, and doubtless to many heretical. The one thing of which I am fairly sure is that, in retrospect, it will be seen to have erred in not being nearly radical enough.” November 1962

On the importance of the contemporary discussion about the concept of God

“...the only issue is whether they remain on the fringe of the intellectual debate or are dragged into the middle and placed squarely under men’s noses. I know that as a bishop I could happily get on with most of my work without ever being forced to discuss such questions...could keep the ecclesiastical machine going quite smoothly, in fact much more smoothly, without raising them...sermons...do not require one to get within remote range of them.” p. 18

On theism

“It is difficult to criticize this way of thinking [supernatural theism] without appearing to threaten the entire fabric of Christianity—so interwoven is it in the warp and woof of our thinking.” But the centre of the debate is concerned with “how far Christianity is committed to a mythological, or supranaturalist, picture of the universe...God as an external, personal, supernatural, spiritual being.” p. 39-40

“I am firmly convinced that this whole way of thinking can be the greatest obstacle to an intelligent faith—and indeed will progressively be so to all except the ‘religious’ few.” p. 43

On non-theism

- God, in Bonhoeffer’s words: “the ‘beyond’ in the midst of our life
- God, in Kierkegaard’s words: a depth of reality reached ‘by a deeper immersion in existence’
- Tillich: “you must forget everything traditional that you have learned about god, perhaps even that word itself. Indeed the line between those who believe in God and those who do not bears little relation to their profession of the existence or non-existence of such a Being. It is a question, rather, of their openness to the holy, the sacred, in the unfathomable depths of even the most secular relationship...seeing the unconditional in the conditioned
- Whereas theism means by ‘a personal God’, “a supreme Person, a self-existent subject of infinite goodness and power, who enters into a relationship with us”; “the phrase ‘a personal God’ is to say that reality at its very deepest level is personal” p. 48
- “To believe in God as love means to believe that in pure personal relationship we encounter, not merely what ought to be, but what is, the deepest, *veriest* truth about the structure of reality”, a true act of faith, considering evidence to the contrary. p. 49
- “a statement is theological not because it relates to a particular Being called ‘God’, but because it asks ultimate questions about the meaning of existence” (Tillich) p. 49
- Statements about God “are statements about the ‘ultimacy’ of personal relationships”
- Bultmann: “assertions about God are in the last analysis assertions about Love”
- Transcendence: when *in* the conditioned relationships of life we recognize the unconditional and respond to it in unconditional personal relationship

4. Jerome Stone's "Is God Emeritus? The rebirth of a forgotten alternative"

Sacred: "My naturalistic outlook suggests to me that the deeper vision we seek to attain is not of another realm or of invisible spirits, but rather a revised insight into importance of things. There is a "depth," not apart from, but right in the midst of things...The sacred is not a separate sphere of life. It is not to be found separate from the pursuits of truth, justice, beauty and selfhood...Sacred things are things of overriding importance."

Ethics: "Religious naturalism...must speak to issues of social justice, environmental care, and repudiation of idolatry. It can speak to them and it can speak as well or better than traditional theism. The sacred is found in the human and the non-human others and its overriding importance undermines all the idols which our minds create."

Transcendence: "In a naturalistic outlook the transcendent dimension of norms and powers is understood as a collection of continually compelling norms and situation transcending creative powers. They are "relatively transcendent" to norms and situations within the world yet are within the world as relevant possibilities and realities beyond a situation as perceived. To illustrate this, the search for the norms of truth or justice means to reach for possibilities relatively transcendent to present attainments and yet relevant to our efforts. Truth and justice remain continually compelling norms no matter how far we come...openness to norms and resources which are beyond our narrowly perceived present situations and yet are not resident in a different realm."

God: "Normally I prefer to use "sacred" or occasionally "divine" as an adjective or adverb. However I find that other people (and I myself in the past) have used the term "God." So I have developed what I call a minimal definition of God for purposes of conversation and common worship, a translation device for communication between various religious voices: "God is the sum total of the ecosystem, community and person empowering and demanding interactions in the universe." Another way I have of speaking of God, when I have to, is to say, that: "God is the world perceived in its value-enhancing and value-attracting aspects." The term God can put an end to thinking, either in the fanaticism of belief or of unbelief. My point is that the theoretical term "the transcendent" and the devotional term "God" (minimally understood) share the same reference to situationally or relatively transcendent resources and challenges, a radical naturalization of the idea."

5. Ursula Goodenough's *The sacred depths of nature* (1998)

Naturalistic religion: "a world view that does not include the supernatural, so it's everything else...Scientific inquiry has provisioned us with a mind-boggling new core narrative — the epic of evolution, the universe story, big history, everybody's story — where humans and human cultures are understood to be emergent from and, hence, a part of nature... these understandings will certainly deepen and may shift with further scientific inquiry...A religious naturalist is a naturalist who has adopted the epic as a core narrative and goes on to explore its religious potential, developing interpretive, spiritual and moral/ethical responses to the story. Importantly, these responses are not front-loaded into the story as they are in the traditions. Therefore, the religious naturalist engages in a process, both individually and in the company of fellow

explorers, to discover and experience them...informed and guided by the mindful understandings inherent in our human traditions, including art, literature, philosophy and the religions of the world.”

“Humans need stories — grand compelling stories — that help to orient us in our lives in the cosmos. The Epic of Evolution is such a story, beautifully suited to anchor our search for planetary consensus, telling us of our nature, our place, our context. Moreover, responses to this story — what we are calling religious naturalism — can yield deep and abiding spiritual experiences. And then, after that, we need other stories as well, human-centered stories, a mythos that embodies our ideals and our passions. This mythos comes to us, often in experiences called revelation, from the sages and the artists of past and present times.”

Mystery: “The evolution of the cosmos invokes in me a sense of mystery; the increase in biodiversity invokes the response of humility; and an understanding of the evolution of death offers me helpful ways to think about my own death.... I call a covenant with mystery where mystery is itself a ... noun but I am using it as literally in absence of category. It's not like I have a mystery then I put attributions onto it it just ... I don't know the answers.

Unity: I don't have any problem accessing experiences of unity. I feel completely part of the universe and all that's going on. When I try to describe it, people say I'm obviously a mystic. It doesn't seem mystical to me in a theistic sense. It's not a state that engenders in me any sense that God is watching over me and paying attention to what I'm doing. It's much more... a belonging to the universe, an overflow of astonishment and wonder and peace and tranquility.

God: “...the concept of a personal, interested god can be appealing, often deeply so. In times of sorrow or despair, I often wonder what it would be like to be able to pray to God or Allah or Jehovah or Mary and believe that I was heard, believe that my petition might be answered. When I sing the hymns of faith in Jesus' love, I am drawn to their intimacy, their allure, their poetry. But in the end, such faith is simply not available to me. I can't do it. I lack the resources to render my capacity for love and my need to be loved to supernatural Beings. And so I have no choice but to pour these capacities and needs into earthly relationships, fragile and mortal and difficult as they often are.”

Ethics: “The good stuff of most religions turns out to be a golden rule that defines a morality which allows humans to flourish in community.”

6. Richard Holloway's *Looking into the distance: the human search for meaning* (2004) Spirituality

Quoting neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, author of *Looking for Spinoza*

“...to reappraise some of the most vexing philosophical problems that have haunted us since the emergence of consciousness. Are we controlled by a separate reality...are the structures of both the universe and the mind explicable in terms of themselves without reference to outside forces...without an external agency guiding (their) development. Damasio offers us a naturalistic account of human spirituality:

'I assimilate the notion of the spiritual to an intense experience of harmony, to the sense that the organism is functioning with the greatest possible perfection. The experience unfolds in association with the desire to act toward others with kindness and generosity. Thus to have a spiritual experience is to hold sustained feelings of a particular kind dominated by some variant of joy, however serene. The center of mass of the feelings I call spiritual is located at an intersection of experiences: Sheer beauty is one. The other is anticipation of actions conducted in 'a temper of peace' and with 'a preponderance of loving affections.' These experiences can reverberate and become self-sustaining for brief periods of time. Conceived in this manner, the spiritual is an index of the organizing scheme behind a life that is well balanced, well-tempered, and well-intended. Spiritual feelings... form the basis for an intuition of the life process.' (p. 29)

Meaning: We seem to be living through a time in which one part of humanity is beginning to claim autonomy or self-governance for itself and to acknowledge that meaning now has to be discovered in the life process itself. We may be no closer to understanding why there is a world, but we are now able to accept the fact that the world itself is the source of the values and meanings we prize most, not some hypothetical transcendent reality which did none of the work yet claims all the credit. One way to express this is to say that the spirit is now engendered by and encountered in the world in which we find ourselves. Rather than positing an external force to account for our most cherished experiences, we begin to understand how they were generated within us in response to the life process itself...this is mystery enough to be going on with, without hanging on to ancient hypotheses that now create more problems for us than they solve." Holloway, *Looking into the distance: the human search for meaning* p. 28-31

Church, etc.

"It is in its work of organised care for others, whatever its theological basis, that Christianity is at its most compelling. Secular spirituality is at a disadvantage here. Because it is diffused throughout society rather than separately organised within it, it is more difficult to get it engaged in systematic and coordinated methods to change society. The problem is not that there is a lack of purely secular bodies dedicated to human welfare and the mending of the world; it is that there is no obvious agency that can gather the godless together to motivate them for the work. There is, of course, a host of agencies in the form of campaigning organisations and highly committed individuals, but the godless don't gather together once a week to be ethically challenged and spiritually uplifted. There have been attempts in the past by secular enthusiasts to copy the methods of the great religions and apply them to worldly purposes, but they were never very successful and have declined more dramatically than the Churches whose techniques they sought to copy. If the medium is the message, then it may be that secular spirituality will make a virtue of its diffused state, since it reflects humanity in its current situation, where community is increasingly something that is chosen rather than something that is given. [talks about the unifying instrument that is the internet]...Another increasingly significant gathering point for the human community is provided by music, which offers to its disciples not only moments of grace and transcendence but also opportunities for protesting against the excesses of the powerful.no single organizing authority is an important mark of contemporary human spirituality ...one its most important strengths... p. 50-51

7. Michael McGhee's articles

Honorary senior fellow in the department of philosophy, University of Liverpool

"This tedious fixation on belief"

April 2010

Personally, after the religious struggles of my Roman Catholic youth I don't much want to hear about what people "believe" – and want to hear even less about their "convictions". In this dangerous and unjust world we need to know what people will do or refuse to do. I am not a believer. I incline towards a secular humanism that leaves space for "spirituality" – conceived as the disciplined search for self-knowledge – and recognises that we can sometimes and beyond the exercise of our will transcend the narrow perspective of ego-centric self-enclosure. To be a believer is to participate in a way of life informed by a conception, not of God, since God is traditionally beyond conception, but of the world and humanity. To become a believer is to come to see the world itself as dependent, contingent, *created*. This vision of things strikes people with the force of a revelation (so that it is natural to think in terms of "conversion" precisely to a way of life not otherwise contemplated): it presents itself as *how things are*, and the resident temptation is to assume that those of us who do not share this vision fail to see how things are. It is how believers act, though, that counts. We secularists should forget the tedious fixation on belief, forget about being "atheist", and concentrate on a conversation about the spiritual strategies for overcoming the common human resistance to living well.

"Humanism needs spirituality"

Oct. 2013

... my generation of ex-Catholics...were alienated by the official church's institutional anxiety about orthodoxy, about a required assent to official teaching about faith and morals. This stifling and culturally threatened atmosphere sat uneasily with a more authentic form of Christianity that focused on the beatitudes, the parables, the human drama of hope and despair, love and betrayal, forgiveness, and the real experiences of crucifixion and resurrection.

Some secular humanists look at these narratives as examples of world literature from which we can learn, if we have the right disposition, though others, who have no trouble with the idea of learning from Homer, say, cannot dissociate the gospel stories from the religious and metaphysical systems they have come to reject as irrational and superstitious: these narratives have alienating histories of doctrinal interpretation that make them practically unavailable.

The distraction of belief was, one might say, a distraction of the attention from the inner life, from practice, conduct and demeanour, the inner life not just of individuals but of communities and the moral dynamic of their relationships. A concern for the inner life – we might call it spirituality – is merely narcissistic, however, unless it is essentially forensic and exploratory, a searching out and overcoming of the forces that betray us into exploitation and violence, and the discovery and sustaining of a perspective that transcends and recoils from those forces...

Crudely, a preoccupation with what we believe or don't believe is an orientation outwards, away from what Kierkegaard would call inwardness, away from the care of the self, which characterised ancient philosophy, and which began, I suggest, not in the wonder and curiosity that properly belongs to what became science, but in moral shock in the face of violence and injustice and our own collusion.

The Features of West Hill United Church:

A Progressive Community of Faith in the Christian Tradition

© West Hill United Church 2004

We are a community of faith committed to love and spiritual growth through shared ministry, dynamic practices, and a diversity of inspiration.

Our foundation is spiritual.
 Our nature is that of community.
 Our commission is to love.
 Our ministry is shared.
 Our practices are dynamic.
 Our sources for inspiration are diverse.
 Our commitment is to spiritual growth.

Feature 1: Our foundation is spiritual

- It is with joy and wonder that we acknowledge the spiritual dimension of life, and within that dimension, that which we call the sacred, holy, or **divine**--mysterious beyond our full comprehension, yet accessible to us in everyday life.
- We hold that all people are of inherent worth and profound value, with the **spiritual capacity** to experience meaning, values, and relationships with others, with themselves, with creation, and with the divine.
- We recognize that people experience and develop their spirituality in **diverse** ways, religious and secular, traditional and contemporary.
- We honour aspects of our scriptural **heritage**, particularly the teachings of Jesus, that have contributed to our understanding and development of the spiritual values we cherish, such as:
 - the Spirit of God experienced as love, forgiveness, wisdom, nurture, and creativity
 - the divine presence within each person
 - reverence and respect for creation
 - personal responsibility for one's life, choices, and spiritual growth
 - the call to compassionate and just relationships, with an emphasis on acceptance, forgiveness, and loving the poor, sick, troubled, marginalized, and powerless
 - finding the holy in the ordinary
 - the benefit of spiritual practices, both personal and communal
- Because we realize our concepts of spiritual matters are ever **evolving**, we are open to new understandings that enrich our experience of the divine.

Feature 2: Our nature is that of community

- We are individuals, families, and groups who freely choose to participate in loving, interdependent **relationships**. We promote respect for rights, dignity, and diversity, and we strive to reflect this respect in our policies, practices, and language.
- Our common bond is **love** in the midst of diversity of belief and practice. We encourage the expression of diverse views, requiring only that such expression and any response to it be made with respect.
- We work toward trust and **consensus** building in our decision-making and creative reconciliation and forgiveness in conflict resolution. Striving to build mutual trust by living out our community values, we are challenged, in times of broken trust, to seek mutual healing.
- We acknowledge the ethical **complexity**, and resultant ambiguity involved in many life issues experienced by individuals and the community as a whole. We strive to protect the right of conscience, and to make life enhancing decisions that promote freedom and protect rights.
- Our understanding and experience of the divine is deepened as we worship, pray, minister, fellowship, and study **together**. Alongside each other, we seek to live authentically, to support, pray, and care for one another, and to share our gifts, talents, experiences and insights with one another.

Feature 3: Our commission is to love

- Our driving purpose is that all our **actions** in all aspects of our lives would reflect the divine, unconditional love we experience. We therefore strive to live with compassion, understanding, kindness, and respect - helping, mending, healing and making whole - to the best of our abilities.
- Moved by sacred hope and convinced of the profound significance of each person as an infinitely precious being, we dream and plan and implement **positive** change to enhance the well being of self, others, and the whole of creation.
- We embrace a vision of peace through **social justice**. We strive to identify and resist injustices in all the places of hurt in the world, including de-humanizing and oppressive conditions, structures, attitudes, messages, and ideas. We strive to create, recognize, celebrate and support those conditions that enhance equity, preserve dignity and respect individuality.
- The divine nature of the love we seek to share moves us to recognize the sanctity of life. We offer, invite, model, raise awareness and educate - others and ourselves - yet all the while **honouring** people's cultures and respecting their freely made choices which enhance life.
- We seek to **balance** self-care with care for others. We strive to recognize and respond to our own spiritual needs, which enables and empowers us to care for those we know and for those beyond our community.

Feature 4: Our ministry is shared

- We hold that each individual is richly gifted for and called to engage in **mutual** ministry, relating to one another with love, compassion, and justice on a personal and community level.
- We seek to recognize gifts in all their **diversity**, a richness that helps build up the community in all *its* diversity; all gifts are seen as having potential spiritual value. We seek to provide and/or promote inclusive opportunities for individuals to discover, develop and use their gifts both within and beyond our community.
- Our understanding of ministry is one in which all people have **equal** access to the divine. We invite some individuals, both professional and volunteer, to a more concentrated use of their gifts, education and training, for the good of the community.
- We benefit from the skills, vision, and insight possible through **team** leadership in the ongoing functioning of our faith community □ □ We join with individuals and organizations beyond our community in partnerships of mutual conviction and concern.
- We seek to identify people with particular **needs** for ministry, and determine how best to utilize our resources to meet those needs.

2. **Feature 5: Our worship practices are dynamic**

- We understand church practices and traditions as human attempts at **facilitating** spiritual experience – helping us connect with the profound reality of divine love within us and helping us apply it in our lives.
- We offer inclusive, participatory **worship** services in which we celebrate that which we recognize as divine and therefore worthy of our praise, gratitude, devotion, and commitment. We employ diverse means such as word, music, silence, ritual, dance, and art.
- Together, we honour the spiritual significance of **life events** such as births, marriages, death, and life beyond death.
- We experience **prayer** and meditation as both mystery and reality. We pray privately and communally for ourselves, one another, and the broader community. We express gratitude, examine our lives, seek wisdom, and offer concern and care for others.
- We are open to **innovations** in the content and style of our practices that may deepen and broaden our experience of the divine.

Feature 6: Our sources for inspiration are diverse

- We seek understanding and relevance for our personal and communal lives, and therefore actively **engage** with resources that challenge our thinking, encourage questions, and offer spiritual insight. We promote strong spiritual grounding accompanied by healthy personal reflection, evaluation, and positive application.
- We regard spiritual resources, including the Bible, as human attempts to **witness** to personal experiences of the divine, to be interpreted within the authors' historical, cultural, and personal context.
- We regularly evaluate and revise our **language** (e.g. teaching, preaching, music, etc.) in order that our message may be clear, relevant, and empowering for all people.

- We seek spiritual inspiration from a **variety** of sources - contemporary and ancient, familiar and unfamiliar – finding them in art, music, nature, literature, humanitarian efforts, etc.
- We see **one another** as primary sources for experiencing the divine and seek to develop ourselves for one another and the community beyond. We cherish this as a serious responsibility and a joyful privilege, calling for commitment, humility, and lightheartedness.

Feature 7: Our commitment is to spiritual growth

- We see the life of faith as a journey comprised of ever **new** experiences and understandings of self, others, the world, and the divine.
- We take personal **responsibility** to seek meaning for ourselves. We enjoy the freedom to challenge all concepts and develop our individual understanding of the divine over the course of our lives.
- We respect the right of all individuals to be on their **own journey**, to make their own choice of resources, discover their own pace, and hold their own understanding of things spiritual. We acknowledge the reality of periods of life where growth is not recognizable, yet hold that these, too, may be formative.
- We encourage each other to live **authentically** - to strive to live to our full potential as responsible, loving people, while also embracing and dealing with the reality of our imperfections and their impact on ourselves, others, and creation.
- We are not alone in this life of faith, for we journey **together** in the spirit of divine love

VISIONWORKS 2009

As individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds and with a diversity of viewpoints, we come together in community, holding in common a reverence for life that moves us to pursue justice, seek truth, live fully, care deeply, and make a difference in the world. While united by life-enhancing values, we are enriched and challenged by our differences in perspectives and beliefs. As we strive to develop meaningful community, we draw from our origins in an historic religious tradition, the knowledge gained about that tradition over time, diverse sources of insight and wisdom, and contemporary ethical and philosophical thought. We distill from these sources the core values we believe are fundamental to right relations with self, others, all life, and the planet. In this progressive work, we attempt to demonstrate openness, intellectual rigour, honesty, courage, creativity, sensitivity, and respect. VisionWorks articulates those common values and understandings that underlie our choices as we set priorities, make decisions, take action, and relate with one another in community. It reflects what we hold to be of utmost significance in our community life, and calls us to evaluate ourselves in light of these values.

Our grounding is the interconnectedness of all life

It is with a deep sense of awe and joy that we acknowledge the wonder of life in all its dimensions. As part of the organic whole we experience life intimately, yet recognize that much is, and may always be, beyond our comprehension. We attest to the capacity to experience and create meaning and purpose beyond physical survival and material gain. This dimension of living, which may be referred to as the spiritual, reaches to the depths of our inner self and also transcends the self as we connect with others and with all of life. We experience both freedom and limitations in our lives. Within that tension we strive to engage with others as interrelated, self-reflective beings, responsible for our choices. Moved by the interrelatedness of life, we choose as foundational the ethical and relational values we believe enhance life and strive to integrate these in the priorities we set and the decisions we make, both individually and as a community. We are aware of the wide diversity of understandings of the concepts of truth, goodness, meaning, and spirituality, as well as the many promises, predictions, and truth claims of religions and philosophies. Within that diversity, we ground our choices in our interconnections and, with our core values as a guide, explore and evaluate possibilities, embrace what we each deem helpful, and demonstrate respect for differences. We open ourselves to new understandings of life and relationship that challenge our previously held perspectives, while availing ourselves of aspects of our heritage that resonate with our values.

Our response to life is love

We choose love as our supreme value. We understand love to mean the choice to act with justice, compassion, integrity, courage, forgiveness, kindness, peace, generosity, responsibility, an appreciation of beauty, and other life-enhancing values. We acknowledge that, as a part of the web of life, we have a significant impact on the environment and all other life with which we share the planet. We therefore strive to live consciously and caringly, increasing our awareness of the consequences of our actions, advocating for rights, and making ethically responsible decisions. We embrace a vision of peace through social justice for all people, of all races, ethnicities, abilities, socioeconomic situations, and sexual identities and orientations. We identify and resist injustice, including oppressive and de-humanizing conditions, social structures, activities, messages, ideas, and attitudes. We help create, support, and celebrate those conditions that promote rights, respect, equity, dignity, and community. Seeking a healthy balance between self-care and care for others, we share time, energy, talents, wisdom, knowledge, skills, material

goods, and our presence with one another in order that we may inspire, encourage, delight, comfort, and help one another. We consider relationships to be both serious responsibility and joyful privilege, calling for commitment, humility, and light-heartedness. We strive to relate with one another authentically and supportively. We value assertiveness, attentive listening, and empathetic response, and encourage the sharing of diverse views, requiring only that communication be respectful. We work toward creative problem solving and conflict resolution. In times of broken trust, we seek mutual understanding, forgiveness, and healing. In areas of ethical complexity, cultural diversity, and conflicting worldviews, we uphold the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and expression, and support freely-made choice. When making moral decisions as a community, we study issues comprehensively, acknowledge uncertainty, and apply life-enhancing values as appropriately and sensitively as possible.

Our sources for inspiration are diverse

In order to gain insight and wisdom for individual and communal living, we actively seek out diverse resources that may inspire us, arouse curiosity, encourage questions, and challenge our perspectives. We regard explanations of life, proposals for beliefs, and historical claims as human, and therefore fallible, attempts to make sense of what is known and unknown. All ideas are formed in particular historical, cultural, and personal contexts and we, in turn, interpret from within ours. We consider no text, tradition, organization, person, or interpretation of experience to be inherently authoritative; rather, we assess all resources on their own merit and honour life-enhancing values in whatever setting they occur. We draw inspiration from ancient and contemporary sources including the arts, creative works, science, wisdom traditions, religion, nature, humanitarian efforts, and each other, directly and indirectly. In group and individual study of resources, we encourage personal evaluation of content, questioning and reflection, and the sharing of insights and suggestions for application. We strive to communicate our perspectives with clarity and sensitivity, conscious that ambiguity and differing worldviews are inevitable. We take care to own our own stories, experiences, and interpretations. As well, we may also offer one another alternate views, information, and interpretation of the application of core values. When communicating on behalf of the community, we choose messages that reflect our core values.

Our gatherings are multi-faceted

We meet regularly to celebrate together, share experience and wisdom, develop relationships, and sense and express gratitude, awe, devotion, concern, and commitment to action. We make use of word, music, silence, art, movement, and symbol, attempting to speak to various personal styles, appeal to all the senses, and address the whole person. We view all traditions, practices, and rituals as attempts to facilitate meaningful experiences and learning opportunities, recognizing that responses differ among individuals. We create means for acknowledging and celebrating the significance of community and life events such as birth, partnering, loss, death, and personal and community accomplishments. We offer a variety of opportunities to focus our thoughts, share joys, express needs and concern, engage in self-reflection, and commit ourselves to action. These are referred to in various ways including prayer, meditation, inner awareness, and connection. We offer educational, experiential, and social opportunities in areas such as personal growth, spirituality, relationships, social action, the environment, health and well-being, religion, history, science, literature, music, and contemporary issues. We promote cooperation among all in the visioning, planning, and operational aspects of our community life. We assist individuals in discovering and developing talents to be offered within and beyond our

community, and designate individuals to fulfill specific spiritual and administrative leadership responsibilities.

Our vision is growth

We take responsibility for continuing to seek and create meaning for ourselves, each person choosing his or her own focus and pace and respecting the right of others to choose theirs. We acknowledge the possibility of growth during the inevitable discouraging, static, and challenging periods in our lives. We seek out resources, relationships, and environments that may nurture and challenge us. We offer opportunities for nurture and challenge to others. We evaluate our lives in light of our core values. We celebrate areas of growth yet also face the reality of our shortcomings and their impact on us, others, and the world. We identify areas in our own lives and the life of the community that we feel need to be addressed, seek forgiveness where appropriate, and attempt positive change wherever possible. As we examine ideas and truth claims to determine their worth and relevance for us, we enjoy the freedom to retain or alter our previous understandings. We recognize that change, even when resulting in positive growth, can involve both loss and gain. We contribute to the growth of this spiritual community in order that it might thrive as a positive influence in our lives and the broader community. We also contribute as individuals and a community to the growth of other organizations that promote life-enhancing values. We seek to increase our understanding of ourselves, others, and the world and improve our ability to make a positive difference. We encourage and support one another as we each strive to fulfill our potential as responsible, loving people. As we strive to live in these ways as individuals in community, we often soar and often stumble. Yet in joy and sorrow, in triumph and trial, in certainty and doubt, we are not alone for we travel together in the spirit of love. © June 18th, 2009 West Hill United Church

REVEREND GRETTA VOSPER
Appellant

THE GENERAL SECRETARY of the GENERAL COUNCIL
Respondent

**JUDICIAL COMMITTEE OF THE
GENERAL COUNCIL
(The United Church of Canada)
Proceedings commenced in TORONTO**

Statement of Argument

**FALCONERS LLP
10 Alcorn Avenue
Suite 204
Toronto, Ontario
M4V 3A9**

**Julian N. Falconer LSUC# 29465R
Akosua M. Matthews LSUC# 65621V**

**Ph: (416) 964-0495
Fax: (416) 929-8179**

Lawyers for the Appellant