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## **Atheist Rev. Gretta Vosper to be “reviewed”**

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Two United Church adherents from the Toronto conference made a motion to interview Rev. Gretta Vosper "with a focus on continuing affirmation of the questions asked of all candidates at the time of ordination."

A committee of the democratic United Church of Canada has unanimously voted for a "review of the effectiveness of Rev. Gretta Vosper," the Toronto clergyperson and author who proudly promotes herself as an atheist and publicly denounces all forms of religion.

The move happened quietly this month, when two United Church adherents from the Toronto conference, Ann Harbridge and Linda Parsons, [made a motion to interview Vosper](#) "with a focus on continuing affirmation of the questions asked of all candidates at the time of ordination" into the United Church of Canada.

I've already had a member of the United Church of Canada email me and say the review of Vosper

reminds her of the “Inquisition.”

That would be the **Inquisition** of the **15th-century Roman Catholic Church in Spain**, which has become notorious for the way it tortured, burned and otherwise murdered at least 5,000 people for perceived unorthodoxy. It doesn’t seem to be very accurate language to use in the more mundane Vosper case.

But it is the kind of exaggerated language that I’m sure is feared by members of the super-tolerant liberal United Church of Canada. I suspect they’ve been worried any attempt to review Vosper’s high-profile atheistic declarations would be seen as close-minded authoritarianism, with Vosper’s supporters portraying her as a “victim” and even a “martyr.”

So far the review of Vosper, who has often been in Vancouver on book tours, has not received any media attention outside the United Church of Canada. But we’ll see what happens when it does.

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The supporters of Vosper claim that she is “courageous” because since 2001 she has been offering an atheistic alternative to belief in an “interventionist” God. I understand Vosper considers herself some version of a “Christian atheist.”

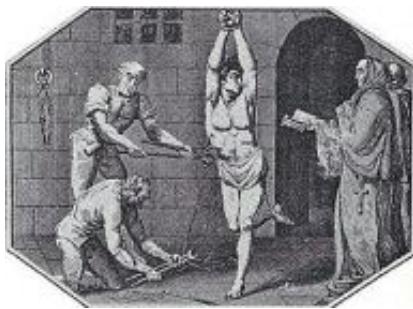
Vosper is not a shrinking violet about her ideas: She recently [publicly urged United Church of Canada Moderator Gary Paterson](#) to “clear the public sphere from the prejudices of religious belief,” since, she argued, religion is a key source of global violence.

But many progressive voices in the United Church of Canada are frustrated because they think Vosper and her supporters, including the roughly 80 who are listed as members of her Toronto congregation, engage in either-or thinking, which critics say sometimes [entraps even the otherwise high-quality United Church Observer](#).

They don’t seem to realize there have long been many ways to believe in a transcendent reality that doesn’t demand blind obedience to an all-powerful supernatural God who “intervenes” when “He” feels like it in the world.

Atheism, say Vosper’s critics, is not the only alternative to the “interventionist” God. Other alternatives have been called “panentheism,” “process” thought, various kinds of “eco-theology,” medieval “mysticism” and, outside Christianity, Sufism and forms of Judaism.

The history of Christianity and other world religions is replete with these kinds of alternative understandings of a “non-interventionist” God. If I had more time, I could name some of the key proponents of these kinds of theology. Maybe later



The Spanish Inquisition was infamous for torturing “heretics.”

There is nothing particularly shocking or radical about what Vosper is promoting from her pulpit, on her blog, on her videos and in her books, which have proved fairly popular with the secular media in part because of the novelty value involved in an atheist speaking from a “Christian” platform.

Otherwise, Vosper’s atheist-humanist views are ordinary to most Canadians and to members of denominations such as the Unitarian Church, which is roughly divided between members who believe in God and members who don’t.

What will be interesting about this upcoming review of Vosper’s effectiveness will be whether the United Church of Canada, which goes out of its way to be [\*\*“diverse yet one in Christ,”\*\*](#) will conclude that it is important to have some boundaries and definition regarding what constitutes being a clergyperson in the denomination. Or is it fine with laissez-faire “theology?”

It looks like the Toronto conference of the United Church of Canada is beginning a review process that happens from time to time in all religious groups, non-profit organizations, political parties, professional associations, NGOs and clubs. It’s trying to determine the minimum criteria an employee (as distinct from a member) has to meet to be considered a bone fide representative of the organization.

(I may be adding to this posting in the future. Right now I have another project on the go.)

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