

*Thank God for Heresy
Presentation made by Caryn Douglas
October 12, 2006 Robertson Wesley United Church*

I invite you to think about a time when you did something that broke the rules, the rules that were spoken or unspoken: maybe it was the time before children were allowed to take communion when you slipped your curious child a piece of bread from the tray, or maybe it was the time that you interrupted your boss in a meeting to point out that he was wrong, or maybe it was the when you developed a crush on the only boy of colour in your school ... when is a time you broke the rules, and how did that feel?

In small groups of 3 share a very quick rendition of your story and what the feelings around breaking the rules were for you.

Tonight we are going to spend some time thinking about rules and those who make the rules and those who break the rules.

On my way to be commissioned as a diaconal minister in the UCC, the Chair of Toronto Conference Settlement Committee looked me straight in the eye and with all the passion of a Spanish inquisitor asked me, "Are you a feminist or a Christian?"

I stand before you as a heretic. For longer than not, for most of what we name as human history, the human history that counts, the human history in which men have been favoured over women, for all of that time, and I include the present, to even be a woman is heretical. For a woman to claim authority, to act in leadership, to proclaim to know the Holy is just, well just, wrong. For a woman to be recognized, listened to, given credibility is an act of heresy. I may stand here as a heretic, but, before you form a circle around me and pick up a stone as large as your fist, let me ask 'who among you is without sin?' Your presence here is as blasphemous as mine. And I say, Thank God for this kind of heresy.

What is heresy? Heresy is anytime you don't agree with me, basically. The label of heresy is usually prescribed by those who are in the dominant position of authority, those who are privileged in some way by the status quo, those who are orthodox. Heresy is any opinion or doctrine at variance with the official or orthodox position. A heretic: someone who publicly dissents from the officially accepted dogma. A dangerous man, an uppity woman. A menace to society, an anti-Christ, a martyr. I don't want to minimize or make light of being a heretic. As we are all likely aware, heresy can be a bloody business. My acts of heresy: being a woman in ministry, preaching from a feminist perspective, sharing the belief that God's primary revelation is in creation, questioning atonement, have all had a cost but that cost has been buffered by the privilege I have in this cultural context. I haven't lost my head over heresy, yet, and its not likely going to happen. That's probably what women in Afghanistan said 10 years ago. And I think of the female engineering students at the Polytechnique in Montreal.

We are talking serious business here. When you cross the powerful, the powerful can

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get cross. I have a teenager, and if you've been there and done that, you will probably recognize this pattern: dissent, questioning, refusal to submit, create anger and fear in those who are being questioned or challenged. Actions emanating from a place of anger or fear are generally pretty irrational. Millennia of irrational, stupid, ridiculous fear driven perspectives have honed misogyny, the hatred of women, into a core tenet of Christianity and every culture it has shaped. To question that dogma is a very dangerous act of heresy. Thank God some women and men have been willing to do it.

Back when I was a student I was introduced to what I found to be an utterly amazing thing: there was a form in the back of the United Church Manual for making a claim of heresy. No kidding. I have it right here. It was in the Manual until the mid 1990's. I didn't check, maybe you can download it from the church's website now. It's official title is "Charge against a member or minister", but the charge that it refers to is a charge of "false teaching" or heresy. In the fine print below the fill in the blank lines we read:

if the charge is one of false teaching, give as nearly as possible the words and the book or publication, with page numbers, in which the said words appear; also the time and place at which the alleged offence was committed

and later, just above the signature of the complainant

I charge that this conduct is an offence against the law of God and/or the faith and practice of the United Church of Canada and I hereby request the *so and so* presbytery to take proper steps to bring the said defendant to **trial**. (Emphasis mine)

A professor from Pine Hill Divinity College named Johnson was the first person in the UCC, in the 1920s to be accused of heresy, false teaching against the law of God, using this form, but not the only one. There have been others. James Gareth Endicott was accused of heresy in the 1950's because of his political activity in support of China. In 1982 the UCC apologized to him.

The accusations of heresy are not limited to the formal process of bringing a charge, nor do they remain in the past.

In 2005 the National Alliance of Covenanting congregations of the United Church, responding to a draft of the UCC new statement of faith declared:

Orthodoxy holds that God is distinct from His creation, a transcendent Trinity of persons wholly other from what He has made. Near its conclusion the draft advances a quite different view, speaking of our "integration with the common ground of all being" (i.e. God), etc. This is Monism, and, in Christian terms, ... a heresy.

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American Presbyterian theologian Harold O.J. Brown writing about Bill Phipps, no stranger to Albertans and no stranger to controversy said, "Today heresy and orthodoxy have changed roles, it is fashionable, not dangerous, to be a heretic, and dull if not unsafe to be orthodox."

But I beg to differ with Dr. Brown. It remains unsafe to be heretical and women know it. They know it in the sexism, well, well grounded in Christian theology which means that women have not yet achieved recognition as full human beings. The curse of Eve, she the temptress, she the evil one, she the one responsible for the fall of all humanity in the eyes of God, she goes with us everyday. She is so embedded in our theology that the idea of a woman standing at the alter of the Roman Catholic Church, the largest Christian Church by far in the world, is so abhorrent the church is prepared to sacrifice the whole priesthood rather than let women be recognized to embody God. The idea of "the fall" is so ingrained in liberal theologies that many so called progressive eco-theologies still paint a picture of an Eden which existed before humanity screwed up creation. We can not carry the idea of Eden and the fall very far until the role of Eve catches up. But thank God, people are expressing other, non-orthodox, heretical theologies.

I have only followed the Jesus seminar work remotely, but if I were asked to toss in my marbles for what was authentically Jesus, I'd vote for every action in which he contravenes the conventions of 1st century Palestine and treats women with respect. You have to think it, why else would the marketers of the early church have kept these milestones of stories, if they hadn't been pointing to the authentic and heretical action of Jesus? The status of women in Jesus' day mirrored that of the status of women under the Taliban and in many other heavily misogynistic countries of today. I can imagine the shock and shame on the face of the disciples as they make their way toward Jacob's well in the desert and find Jesus face to face, deep in storytelling and theological reflection with a woman. If you listen closely you can hear their whispered disapproval. There just had to be division and debate among the followers, but somehow the vision that included women was not defeated ... "the twelve were with him and also some women ... Mary, called Magdalene, ...Jo-anna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means." In a society where women had absolutely no right to bear witness, where women's word counted for notta, it is to a woman that the risen Christ is revealed. "Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (John 20)"

But before the ink is dry on the view that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28) some other, more acceptable to the marketing firm, ideas appear.

“Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. (1 Timothy 2:11-12) And just incase anyone should have forgot about “She who is ...” we are reminded in the very next verses of Timothy why women should be only seen when necessary, “For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. (1 Timothy 2,13-14)

This misogynist attitude persisted after New Testament times.

In the second century we have church father, Tertullian,: what have you got to say about women: "You are the devil's gateway";

Coming to the 3rd century, Father Origen would you share what you wrote: "What is seen with the eyes of the creator is masculine, and not feminine, for God does not stoop to look upon what is feminine and of the flesh".

Epiphanius, what is your fourth century word: "The devil seeks to vomit out his disorder through women."

And finally, let's hear from St Thomas Aquinas, arguably the most influential theologian of the 13th century :

As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active power of the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of a woman comes from defect in the active power....

These are the guys who are shaping dominant, acceptable theology, these are the rule makers. These are the guys who are establishing what is orthodox. These are the guys who get to name what is outside the bounds, they are the ones who brand with the large letter “H” and what is clear to me is that they would have whip stitched the H on Jesus in a flash. It is no wonder that sexism flourishes, it is no wonder that women are in danger anytime they act like full human beings. It is no wonder that women have resisted this blasphemy.

A lot happened in 13th century Europe. While Aquinas was writing his systematic theology John Duns Scotus, a scholastic theologian was also busy in the academy. His theological schema became the subject of controversy and he was ridiculed for it. Even if you haven't heard of Duns Scotus, you probably have heard of his legacy; the duns or dunce cap.

It would be my observation that there are three waves of response to which women who dare to act heretically are treated. One is ridicule, but often before women are ridiculed for their actions there may be a period of tolerance, during which the women provide the

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status quo and powerful with a source of entertainment, amusement and distraction. There are also a source of new ideas which can later be appropriated but not until the women have been put in their place. After ridicule, if it doesn't succeed in silencing women or returning them to their proper place comes persecution.

The beguines, a movement of women in the 13th century in Europe illustrates this pattern. They were lay women, living in simplicity and with great piety, helping people in distress and supporting themselves. They did not take vows to an order, but lived communally, embracing poverty and charity. At the height of the movement as many as 10% of women in some cities were beguines. Chroniclers of the era speak of them with puzzlement, recognizing their piety but bemused by their unorthodox status. But those in authority were suspicious and the beguine's status as bemusers was not held by all. They were not bound by a rule, they came under no man's authority, they stood outside ecclesiological orderliness. Some were mystics and their visions and the inspiration of their lives was influencing others, this was a threat to those who spoke the official line. The men who were willing to champion the beguines, to ensure that they would be reasonably tolerated and try to protect them from charges of heresy demanded that the beguines relinquish their independence in return for their efforts. Men like Jacques de Vitry saw them as "significant and potentially useful to the church, but my enthusiasm is tempered by the possible dangers of their extraregular status". He negotiated tolerance of the beguines with the Pope but from then on the beguines had to become more cloistered and had to be under the direction of a male confessor. The tolerance came at a cost.

This didn't stop them from being ridiculed. The council of Vienne said of them,

"We have been told that certain women commonly called beguines, afflicted by a kind of madness, discuss the Holy Trinity and the divine essence, and express opinions on matters of faith and doctrine, deceiving many simple people. Since these women promise no obedience to anyone and do not renounce their property, they are certainly not religious, although they wear a habit and are associated with such religious orders as they find congenial."

This tact of ridicule and critique however, didn't prove sufficient to shut down the activity of the women so the next phase of persecution is undertaken. Marguerite Porete was a beguine. Around 1295 she wrote a book called the *Mirror of Simple Souls* and the bishop didn't like it. She had been critical of the corruption of spirituality in the church. In essence she argued that ordinary people could have genuine faith and might actually lead the church to a more faithful witness. For her writings, urging the soul be put through 7 stages of reflection to find oneself in full union with the will of God to do acts of mercy she was imprisoned, tortured and burned at the stake, deemed a heretic by a panel of theologians at the University of Paris. Ironically, 200 years later her book

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resurfaced, without her authorship attached and became a very important book for mystics throughout Europe, widely reproduced and distributed for without its association with an uppity, heretical woman, is wasn't nearly as dangerous as once deemed.

As women gain access to traditional tools of the system's power: scripture, education, community support and a motivating mandate, when they develop the capacity for things like leadership and are known to reveal God they become highly feared by the ecclesiastical authorities.

This isn't just a historical note. It remains the truth today.

During the Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, (some people might better recognize it as the Decade for women in solidarity with women) back in 1987, which isn't really THAT long ago, I did a student field placement with the United Church's Interdivisional Decade Cte, a committee made up of all women, with the exception of one man. Observing some things that were happening with women in the area of human resources in the national church office, we noted in our minutes that we would devote some time at a subsequent meeting to reviewing some statistics that the church itself had generated about its employment patterns. When our minutes were shared with the General Secretaries of the Divisions, these are staff people in senior positions in the UCC, we got a written response from one of them explaining that "the mandate of the committee was to monitor the decade, and that 'thinking' about such things as systemic patterns, that might reveal sexism, are beyond the mandate."

Isn't that fascinating. Power in the hands of women is very dangerous. The power to think, which includes the power to theologize, can unsettle the orthodox so much that even in the liberal United Church, they would put in writing the sanction on thinking.

One of the most stunning illustrations of the fear of women gaining power and status as people in their own right are the witch persecutions that occurred in Europe and North America over several centuries. In the centuries of the European enlightenment a woman suspected of being a witch might be tried for this charge by having a large rock tied to her body and put in the river. If she survived this was evidence she was a witch and she could then be executed. If she drown, she was entitled to a Christian burial.

I want to draw your attention back to the form for heresy from the United Church Manual and remind you of its direction to take to trial a suspected offender. On the same page there is a form for communicating the charge to the accused heretic, with an admonishment to "take notice that the said complaint will be read before the session or presbytery on such and such a date" and a form for requiring the appearance of witnesses, who are directed to appear to "give evidence as far as you know concerning a charge of ...". These forms could have been in use in Salem in 1692.

Witch Trials Salem, MA 1692

Voice One

January 20

Nine-year-old Elizabeth Parris and eleven-year-old Abigail Williams began to exhibit strange behavior, such as blasphemous screaming, convulsive seizures, trance-like states and mysterious spells. Within a short time, several other Salem girls began to demonstrate similar behavior.

Voice Two

Mid-February

Unable to determine any physical cause for the symptoms and dreadful behavior, physicians concluded that the girls were under the influence of Satan.

Voice One

Late February

Prayer services and community fasting were conducted by Reverend Samuel Parris in hopes of relieving the evil forces that plagued them. In an effort to expose the "witches", a witch cake was made with rye meal and the afflicted girls' urine. This counter-magic was meant to reveal the identities of the "witches" to the afflicted girls.

Pressured to identify the source of their affliction, the girls named three women, including Tituba, Parris' Carib Indian slave, as witches. Warrants were issued for the arrests of Tituba, Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne.

Voice Two

March 1

Magistrates examined Tituba, Sarah Good, and Sarah Osborne in the meeting house in Salem Village. Tituba confessed to practicing witchcraft.

Over the next weeks, other townspeople came forward and testified that they, too, had been harmed by or had seen strange apparitions of some of the community members. As the witch hunt continued, accusations were made against many different women.

Voice Three

March 12

Martha Corey is accused of witchcraft.

Voice Four

March 19

Rebecca Nurse is denounced as a witch.

Voice Three

March 28

Elizabeth Proctor is denounced as a witch.

Voice Four

April 3

Sarah Cloyce, Rebecca Nurse's sister, is accused of witchcraft.

Voice One (Magistrate) What evil spirit have you familiarity with?

Voice Two (Woman) None.

Voice One Have you made no contract with the devil?

Voice Two No.

Voice One Why do you hurt these children?

Voice Two I do not hurt them. I scorn it.

Voice One Who do you employ then to do it?

Voice Two I employ no body.

Voice One What creature do you employ then?

Voice Two No creature. I am falsely accused.

Voice One Where does the devil reside in you?

Voice Two I do not know the devil.

Voice One Return her to the prison, for the devil has hold of her tongue.

Voice Three

April 11

Elizabeth Proctor and Sarah Cloyce are examined.

Voice Four

April 19

Abigail Hobbs, Bridget Bishop, Giles Corey, and Mary Warren are examined. Abigail Hobbs confessed.

Voice One "... They told me if I would not confess I should be put down into the dungeon and would be hanged, but if I would confess I should save my life."

Voice Three

April 22

Nehemiah Abbott, William and Deliverance Hobbs, Edward and Sarah Bishop, Mary Easty, Mary Black, Sarah Wildes, and Mary English are examined. Only Nehemiah Abbott is cleared of charges.

Voice Four

May 9

One of the afflicted girls, Sarah Churchill, is also examined.

Sarah Osborne dies in prison in Boston.

Voice Three

June 2

Initial session of the Court is held. Bridget Bishop is the first to be pronounced guilty of witchcraft and condemned to death.

Voice Four

June 10

Bridget Bishop is hanged in Salem.

Voice Two

"I am no witch. I am innocent. I know nothing of it."

Voice Three

June 29-30

Rebecca Nurse, Susannah Martin, Sarah Wildes, Sarah Good and Elizabeth Howe are tried for witchcraft and condemned.

Voice One

"Oh Lord, help me! It is false. I am clear. For my life now lies in your hands...."

Voice Four

July 19

Rebecca Nurse, Susannah Martin, Elizabeth Howe, Sarah Good, and Sarah Wildes are executed.

Voice Two

"If this is the last moment I was to live, God knows I am innocent..."

Voice Three

August 2

George Jacobs, Sr., Martha Carrier, George Burroughs, John and Elizabeth Proctor, and John Willard are tried for witchcraft and condemned.

Voice One

"...I am wronged. It is a shameful thing that you should mind these folks that are out

of their wits."

Voice Four

September 9

Martha Corey, Mary Easty, Alice Parker, Martha Carrier, Ann Pudeator, Dorcas Hoar, and Mary Bradbury are tried and condemned.

Voice Two

"I do plead not guilty. I am wholly innocent of such wickedness."

Voice Three

September 19

Giles Corey is pressed to death for refusing a trial.

Voice Four

September 22

Martha Corey, Margaret Scott, Mary Easty, Alice Parker, Ann Pudeator, Wilmott Redd, Samuel Wardwell, and Mary Parker are hanged.

Voice Three

After 20 people had been executed in the Salem witch hunt,

Voice Four

the governor was moved by criticism and intervened.

Voice One

There were more trials,

Voice Two

but no one else was convicted.

The witch trials illustrate what happens when some kind of bizarre social pattern meets the ingrained and acceptable idea of heresy which is so well embedded in the Christian perspective. I hope that this litany also illustrates what happens when propaganda and peer pressure mount, when fear overtakes calm, reason and responsible judgement. What we need to know is that this kind of community response isn't isolated to a by gone era. Is the response to 9 11 any different? Is the view of suspicion and the absurd accusations made against witches any different from the way Muslims have been treated by some? The horror of the witch trials could happen easily again and I would argue that women are particularly vulnerable because our hold on being accepted as full human beings is so tenuous.

The women who were frequently denounced as witches were women whose behavior or economic circumstances were somehow disturbing to the social order and conventions

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of the time. They either had too much power or they were among the very least powerful. Women are vulnerable when they find themselves outside of the norm, when they venture a way a little from the pack. What continually amazes me is how women find themselves in these situations. Sometimes they do it consciously, defiantly challenging and breaking the rules, more often though they get into it naively, just a little step at a time until they look back and see that the rest of the herd is along way off. Successful heretics learn to regroup and gather others around them. I want to look at an example of each.

Nellie McClung, suffragist, politician, organizer, public speaker, strategist for change, proponent of the social gospel and part of fashioning what we might now call the first wave of feminist theology. Nellie wrote these words before she was recognized in Canadian law to be a person, before she could sit as a member of a church board, before she could teach in a theological school. These are her words from 1915:

From *In Times Like These*, published in 1915)

It is sometimes stated as a reason for excluding women from the highest court of the church, that Christ chose men for all of his disciples--that it was to men, and men only, that he gave the command: 'Go ye into the world and preach the gospel to every creature,' but that is a very debatable matter. Christ's scribes were all men, and in writing down the sacred story, they would naturally ignore the woman's part of it. It is not more than twenty years ago that in a well-known church paper appeared this sentence, speaking of a series of revival meetings: "The converted numbered over a hundred souls, exclusive of women and children." If after nineteen centuries of Christian civilization the scribe ignores women, even in the matter of conversion, we have every reason to believe that Matthew, Mark, Luke or John might easily fail to give women a place "among those present".

The church has been dominated by men and so religion has been given a masculine interpretation, and I believe the Protestant religion has lost much when it lost the idea of the motherhood of God. There come times when human beings do not crave the calm, even-handed justice of a father nearly so much as the soft-hearted, loving touch of a mother, and to many a man or woman whose home life has not been happy, "like as a FATHER pitieth his children" sounds like a very cheap and cruel sarcasm.

It has been contended by those high in authority in church life, that the admission of women into all the departments of the church will have the tendency to drive men out. Indeed some declare that the small attendance of men at church services is accounted for by the "feminization of the church," which is, in other

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words, an admission of a very ugly fact that even in the sacred precincts of the church, women are held in mild contempt.

Women have certainly been allowed to labour in the church. There is no doubt of that. The women may lift mortgages, or build churches, or any other light work, but the real heavy work of the church, such as moving resolutions in the general conference or assemblies, must be done by strong, hardy men!

The antagonism of the church of receiving women preachers has its basis in sex jealousy. I make this statement with deliberation. A gentleman of the old school, who believes women should all be housekeepers, whether they want to be or not, once went to hear a woman speak; and when asked how he liked it he grudgingly admitted that it was clever enough. He said it seemed to him like a pony walking on its hind legs--it was clever but not natural.

When all is over, the battle fought and won, and women are regarded everywhere as human beings and citizens, many women will remember with bitterness that in the day of our struggle, the church stood off, aloof and dignified, and let us fight alone.

I like to think sometimes that I am Nellie McClung reincarnated. Her approach was intentional, defiant, feisty. It was risky. Her stance made her the subject of ridicule. She experienced intimidation, she was threatened with violence, she was stalked. But think what her courage to break the rules accomplished for women in Canada.

Never retreat,
Never explain,
Never apologize,
Get the thing done and let them howl.

Nellie was the only woman at the 1st General Council of the United Church. She led the fight to get Lydia Gruchy ordained in 1936, the first woman ordained in the UCC. She was the chairman (sic) of the Deaconess Committee and was influential in the United Church Training School, a forerunner of CCS.

The other forerunner to CCS was the Anglican Women's Training College, like the United Church school and the Methodist and Presbyterian schools before it, AWTC provided women with preparation for ministry, some as deaconesses, some as overseas missionaries and some as Bishop's Messengers.

Ian Caton, Deaconess and Bishop's Messenger, was one of those women whose movement to break the rules happened in small, incremental steps. She didn't defiantly

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set out to become the first woman ordained in the diocese of Saskatoon in the Anglican church in Canada. (She was the 7th woman ordained in the church, in December 1976, a week after the first 6 women were ordained in other dioceses.) She was responding to a need with the gifts and skills she had. If in the 1950's no man could be found to serve the mission on the northern edge of European settlement in SK, well, said Ina, I could certainly go.

From her book, *Reflections on a Life of Mission and Service*

She has just arrived, in the middle of a Saturday night, fresh from the Anglican Women's Training College, after a very long train ride, to her new posting at the Endeavour Mission, where she joined the other deaconess and a local woman lay worker:

In the morning, everyone was busy. They all had jobs to do, Services started far out in the country, and the final one was in the village where the Mission House was located. I was told that I was expected to preach, but [given the circumstances of my late arrival] I wouldn't have to do all the services, that I would be given the day to rest and prepare my sermon for the evening service. I was in a strange place, and I had no books yet. But I had my Bible.

We had no telephone. Our drinking water was delivered in a can on Monday and it was to last all week. We had wood fires and outside facilities. We had a chemical toilet in the basement, but we only used that when the weather was particularly nasty; otherwise, we trotted outside. We had an ice box in the basement.

I would take the passenger train up on Thursday mornings, it left at 5:20 am and then travel with the company train back down the line, getting home by Sunday. There was the children's group and visiting especially with women at the company end, followed by the young people's group after supper. Friday morning would be the kindergarten, Sunday morning was there was Sunday school and service at the company end first, and then again in the hamlet. In between all these activities there was visiting. I would be ready to preach at the evening service at the Mission. Some weeks were interrupted by funerals, snow storms or emergencies, where my presence was expected.

After moving to a Mission closer to Saskatoon, in the 1960s Ina recalls

I began to attend the Synod meetings. I was not automatically told to be there as the clergy were. I could go only by invitation. And in those first years, if I wanted to say anything, I had to ask one of the men to say it for me. Needless to say, I

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managed to keep quiet. Later things eased and I was allowed to speak, but not vote because I was only a woman. At first I sat very meekly and kept quiet, no matter how I was boiling inside. It rankled a little bit, because by and large, I was doing the same work as the men were doing. And in some cases, I was physically doing much harder work and yet I still wasn't allowed to participate. When we adjourned for meals, it was also awkward. I learned to sit at a table first and then men would come and join me, they pretty much had to. I remember on one occasion two men were talking and they didn't notice who they were sitting down beside. Once they got a look at me, they got up and moved.

Just when all the ferment about the ordination of women began I'm not sure. Some graduates of the Anglican Women's Training College were lobbying for ordination. They didn't make presentations to General Synod, they weren't given the privilege of speaking. But they were a presence at the meeting. They made themselves felt by talking to people and by having people who were friendly towards women wear something to signify how they felt.

I had become very uncomfortable, I was trying to see both sides of the picture, but I was beginning to become more and more disturbed. It began to be openly discussed. And believe me, there were some very heated discussions. But on the whole, to me, they seemed to lack substance. It was all, or nearly all, emotional. There was very little reference to the scriptures, and very little exegetical work, many of the arguments were frivolous. One man said that he couldn't possibly have a woman on his staff because the vestry only had one washroom! There wasn't any real reason for women not be ordained because women would go to places where apparently the men were not prepared to go. Now this is not bias on my part, I had done it.

In 1971, Ina was ordained a deacon, in 1976, she became the first woman priest in the her diocese. Her ordination attracted a lot of media attention.

Two men were ordained at the same time I was. Again, the CBC wanted to interview me on television, but I refused to appear unless the two men were included. Well, I might have saved the two men the trouble of appearing because they were practically ignored, and I found that almost unforgivably rude. The next morning, just as I was having breakfast, the CBC phoned from Toronto, wanting to interview me again. I said no. [When I told the] Bishop he was not pleased, but all those years of denying me a voice and now they wanted me to speak.

There are still areas where one runs into difficulties. People have a right to their own interpretation, as long as they are interpreting Scripture with Scripture, not

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with emotions or what other people say. I don't ever wish to tread roughly over them, but rather to understand them with sympathy and with love.

Ina died in January 2004.

Feisty Nellie, incremental Ina. The third approach to breaking the rules is to do it as a community. I don't need a hat for this part of my presentation, for I stand here as I am as a member of this community of heretics, for which I give thanks.

That community is the one of deaconesses/diaconal ministers in the United Church of Canada. I sometimes muse that I could be the poster child for the United Church, I wasn't born into it, but after 18 months as an Anglican I made my way to the UC, arriving at the same time as the "new curriculum" I have been profoundly shaped by all that the UCC is. I don't know whether my bid for the poster position would be enhanced or sabotaged by my decision to respond to the call into the diaconate. The expression of the diaconate in the UC is unique in the world, that ought to be in my favour, but it is also marginalized, at best misunderstood, sometimes maligned and has been the target of attack. It is largely a movement of women, interesting, tolerated, ridiculed and persecuted.

Like the movements of women and men in former centuries, who have organized on the margins of the mainstream of the church, the movement of deaconesses, and in the last 35 years, diaconal ministers, including some men, has been suspect. The school where I minister, the Centre for Christian Studies is cap in hand with the diaconal movement as a suspect place.

The attempts to keep diaconal ministers under control are generally subtle and covert. They are of course, the same techniques used to control women generally so those who are women in ministry would recognize the experiences of marginalization, silencing, overlooking, undermining, dismissing. The powers that be would not, for the most part name diaconal ministry as heresy. The working of sexism, misogyny and clerical patriarchy is too sophisticated for that. An aside here, I want to make clear that the 'powers that be' include diaconal ministers, I am well prepared to take my full share of responsibility for the role I place in perpetuating the practices which directly work to diminish my capacity. Such is the nature of a systemic reality of which we are all a part. Despite this water in which we swim, diaconal ministers have done incredible things. Thank God for the rule breaking that has gone on.

The claims that I want to make for diaconal ministry do not belong exclusively to the movement, there have been many other allies in the acts of rule breaking, but the movement has been visible and sometimes iconic. Diaconal ministry has been a powerful force in giving voice to feminist theological views, sharing Mary Daly's view

*Thank God for Heresy
Presentation made by Caryn Douglas
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'That when the God is male and the male is God", giving visibility to the issues of homophobia and heterosexism, in empowering children to be full members of the church and in sharing power with the laity. It is the fear directed at CCS and at the diaconal movement, fear of a place that has nurtured women's power and has organized women, fear of its proclamation and embodiment of a feminist liberation theology that leads directly to the kind of question aimed at me, 'are you a feminist or a christian?'

I think of women who are members of this community, women like
Shelley Finson: now retired in NS, staffing the Friends of Hagar and the Movement for Christian Feminism in the 1960s and 70s
Barbara Elliott: who before her death in the 1990s worked diligently as a thorn in the flesh of structures, particularly in SK, to advocate for women and for people with illness and disability
Joyce Scott: now in her 80s and retired to Vancouver Island, who worked away until the United Church issued a formal apology to women like herself who were "disjoined", that is kicked out of diaconal ministry when they got married, a practice in the UCC until 1962

Thank God for these women and the community with which they identify for their acts of courage in challenging the orthodox ideas of the role of women and the understanding of the fullness of human dignity.

A heretic in one generation would have been a saint in another ...

Now it is your turn:

Who do you know who has been a heretic? Who should we give thanks for today?

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