

Good But Not Religious (GBNR)

JANUARY 2021 - A monthly update on Keith Martin's work as a nonreligious chaplain and educator online

LETTING GO OF GOD (and embracing goodness)



At the University of Guelph a year ago, Keith offered a series of Good But Not Religious Monthly Get-togethers with TED-like talks on the following:
Jan: Letting Go of God (and embracing goodness)
Feb: Letting Go of an Afterlife (and embracing this life)
Mar: Letting Go of Meaning (and embracing meaning)

For the January event, he played excerpts from an autobiographical monologue by Julia Sweeney called "Letting Go of God." Julia was raised Catholic, became disillusioned with the God of the Old Testament, then the New Testament, left Christianity and explored Buddhism, God as Nature, God as Love (especially from a New Age perspective), and ended up letting go of God altogether.

(Keith's own journey was from evangelical Christianity to progressive Christianity to 'spiritual but not religious'—from believing in God as a supernatural Being to God as a metaphor for Goodness. See his novel *Seismic Shift* on his website.)

Here are excerpts from Julia's journey:

As I grew and matured, my understanding of God also grew and matured. I mean, he really was sort of a Santa Claus at first, but then he became more abstract. I had many experiences which I considered to be religious, which confirmed my belief in God. . . . I had a few times . . . felt the power of the Holy Spirit come over me and just shake me to the core."

I began to drift East, spiritually speaking. . . . When I came back to L.A. . . . I kept thinking, "The Buddhism we get in California is all cleaned up for us."

I realized I wasn't just looking for inner peace so I could be happier or more content with my life. I was trying to figure out why I was born, who God was, and I guess, what the meaning of life was.

I thought, "God is not nature. I mean, nature is floods and famines and earthquakes and viruses and little Blue-footed Booby babies getting their brains pecked out by their stronger siblings. . . . God is a moral force and nature is utterly amoral. Nature doesn't care about me . . ."

One day I thought, "What if it's true? What if humans are here because of pure random chance? What if there is no guiding hand, no external regulation, no one watching?"

Oh my God, there is no God!

"I don't know if I can not believe in God! I need God. I mean we have a history together."

But then I thought, "Wait a minute. If you look over my life, every step of maturing for me, every single one, had the same common denominator. It was accepting what was true over what I wished were true. This was the case about guys, about my career, about my parents.

So how can I come up against this biggest question, the ultimate question, 'Do I really believe in a personal God,' and then turn away from the evidence? How can I believe just because I want to? How will I have any respect for myself if I did that?"

I said to him, "I'm sorry God; it's not you. It's me. It's just, I don't think you exist. I mean, God, look at it this way: it's really because I take you so seriously that I can't bring myself to believe in you. If it's any consolation, it's sort of a sign of respect."