

My Personal Path Beyond Belief

For most of my life, faith, church, God were formative, central, deeply influential.
With roots in the Presbyterian church, I explored branches of Baptist, Pentecostal, Evangelical and Messianic traditions

First stage of emergence: faith-based education and experience

- evangelical university (Seattle Pacific University—Free Methodist)
- study of biblical and church history, textual criticism, Greek (alternative Christianities)
- study of World Religions (alternative Faiths)
- study of Philosophy (alternative questions with no clear answers)
- seminary studies through a consortium of schools (Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley)

Second stage of emergence: chaplaincy and parish ministry

- interfaith collaboration (private school, jails, streets, shelters—focus on compassionate presence rather than faith)
- parish associate in a Bay Area Presbyterian church for ten years (leading in worship, teaching)
- faith became secondary, then unnecessary
- listening to and learning from the “unheard voices” (outsiders, outcasts, castaways from community and church)

Third stage of emergence: leaving ordination as personal exodus

- left my ordination (2001): “Followed Jesus (the outsider) out the door of the church.”
- moving from faith to a secular worldview (this present world rather than other worlds/realities beyond)
- “good without god” (belief not necessary for ethical living or compassionate action)
- “Nature is enough” (natural world/universe is home—all we know or can know)
- served as a shelter director for a coalition of congregations and agencies
- served as a housing manager for an ecumenical non-profit

Present Path Beyond Belief: continuing emergence

- writing (positive theme: A Freethinker’s “Gospel”—emphasis on the good; addressing reasonable questions/issues)
- teaching (constructive theme: Freethought—building bridges to wider, deeper understanding)
- Humanist Celebrant (secular clergy; humanistic worldview/naturalistic ethics; guided by reason and common sense)
- seeking the paths forward (exploring creative opportunities and possibilities with hopefulness)

Another view of the journey: from “Co” to “Dis” and back to a “New Co”)

I once saw Church/Faith as “Co”

- community
- cooperation
- communion
- compassion

Over time, I found much of Church/Faith as “Dis”

- disunity (within the Church, churches and between faith communities)
- disconnected (from many outsiders and/or the larger community and culture)
- distracted (by tradition, ritual, theology, scripture, creed)
- discouraging and disappointing (personally and professionally)

Rather than burning bridges I chose to stay in relationship

- family, friends, colleagues (various faiths and no faith)
- wife (Presbyterian minister; spiritual director; enneagram teacher)
- teaching Freethought (connecting believing and non-believing students)
- speaking in congregations (where freethinking is welcome)
- writing for both secular and spiritual audiences (to engage; more “co” than “dis”)
- returning to the “Co” for collaboration, coalition and wider communication

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