



By Roger C

I quit believing in a God when I was 19 years old.

I was brought up as a Catholic. My mother was very religious, and she certainly pushed it on me, on all of her five children, and on others as well. When her brother – my uncle – quit going to church and stopped believing in a deity, for years she would have absolutely nothing to do with him.

We went to a Catholic church – 3 ½ miles away – every Sunday.

When I was in grade 2, I was put in a Catholic school. After I entered the classroom and chose a desk, this is the very first thing I heard: “Debout, Tourner, À genoux”. Stand up, Turn, On your knees. And then we would say the Lord’s Prayer.

This was done every morning.

That wasn’t all. Regularly, a priest would show up and we would have to do confessions. We were required to come up with a list of sins we committed and tell it to the priest. I would often have to invent some sins because, well, I couldn’t think of anything that I had done wrong. Of course the confessions would end with a prayer: “O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended You and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, but most of all because they offend you, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love... Amen.”

For the record, In the United States, the Lord’s Prayer was prohibited in public schools in 1962. In Canada it wasn’t until 1988 that the use of the Lord’s Prayer in public schools ended. The Ontario Court of Appeal ruled that the “recitation of the Lord’s Prayer ... imposes religious

observances on nonbelievers” and that is a violation of an individuals freedom of conscience, as per the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Regarding this decision by the Ontario Court of Appeal, let me just say this: “Thank God”.

After the Catholic school for six years, I was off to high school.

At the time there was a grade thirteen. It was then that I literally exploded and decided that there was no God. None of the God stuff made any sense to me.

A God, a Heaven, a Hell, and a Purgatory? Is this something I was supposed to believe? If I was a good enough person when I died, would I be in purgatory for a couple of million years and in Heaven for an eternity? This makes zero sense at all to me.

Again, at age 19 I quit believing in a god. Frankly, because religion had been forced upon me as a child, the non-belief was an existential crisis. If a God doesn't exist what now is my life all about? I quit high school and started hitchhiking all over Canada. And then what did I do?

I decided to go to university. What was I doing there? I was studying religion! I simply wanted to know if the God thing was Fact or Fiction.

I got a Bachelor of Arts degree in Religious Studies at Laurentian University in 1978. Later on, I went to McGill University in Montreal. I got a Master of Arts degree in Religious Studies there in 1982.

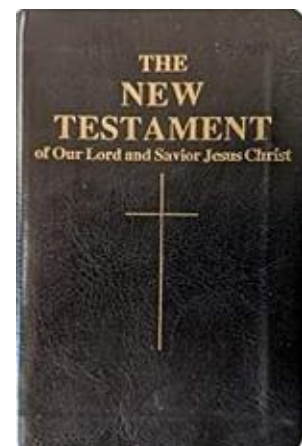
Some bad things happened around that time. My mother's youngest son – my brother Danny – killed himself by taking too many drugs. My mother was badly beaten and raped. A few years later, in a hospital for weeks, my mother died of cancer.

Did she still believe in a God. Obviously, God hadn't helped her. That's fact, not fiction. But, yes, she still believed in God.

Back to McGill. I was there for several years. I taught. I learnt. I even learned Koine Greek so I could read the New Testament in its original language. In all my time there, there was never any evidence or proof that a God existed. Believing in a God has nothing to do with logic. It's faith. And this is the definition of faith in the New Testament in Hebrews 11: “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

The God thing is Faith. Nothing to do with Fact.

Alright, moving on.



The God concept is often pushed on people. Sad but true. I talked about how that happened to me when I was a child. But it also happened to me in recent years.

I am a recovered alcoholic. I drank like a fiend for many, many years. Finally in 2010, after a DUI, I quit drinking. So, I have now been sober for over thirteen years.

And, like most people in recovery, I am a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, otherwise known as AA. Worldwide there are two million members of AA. There are, in Hamilton, 49 AA groups that have a least one meeting a week.

And let's be clear. Traditional AA pushes God on folks in recovery. One of the very few "approved" books in the fellowship – published in 1939, it is called *Alcoholics Anonymous* – mentions God (or Him, etc.) 281 times in its first 164 pages. The book includes 12 Steps – each one of these steps is meant to help people get, and stay, sober – and six of these 12 steps refer to God. By the way, this book is also frequently called the *Big Book*.

Another thing: many traditional AA meetings end with the Lord's Prayer. It's not allowed anymore in schools but is very regular in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Early on I was often told that unless I came to believe in a God, I would again be a drunk. For the record, that is Fiction. Not Fact.

Indeed, as the author of Alcoholics Anonymous, Bill Wilson, put it years after the book was published:

In AA's first years I all but ruined the whole undertaking... God as I understood Him had to be for everybody. Sometimes my aggression was subtle and sometimes it was crude. But either way it was damaging – perhaps fatally so – to numbers of non-believers.

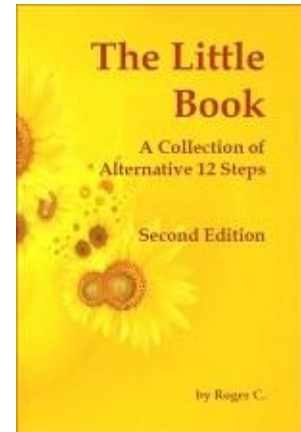
Early in sobriety, I became a member of a secular AA group in Toronto called Beyond Belief. The group was booted out of AA in 2011. Why? Because we had removed God from the 12 Steps. A half a dozen years later the group was legally returned to the Toronto AA Intergroup.

Back in July 2011, because we had been booted out, I launched a website called AA Agnostica. Its goal was to help people in recovery who by and large considered God a Fiction. It lasted for 11 years, and I quit posting new articles in July of last year. But the website is still up, alive, and popular worldwide.

Over those eleven years I posted an article every Sunday and sometimes on Wednesdays. That led to a total of 745 articles. These were written by a huge diversity of people not only in North America but from around the world. Men and women who knew recovery was indeed possible without a God.

To date, there has been a total of almost 4 million people who have read articles on my AA Agnostica website.

I am close to the end of my talk. But let me add that over the years I have published a dozen books. Many of them are about secular sobriety. I'll mention just two of them. One of my favorites is a book written by two women which was initially published way back in 1991. It's called [The Alternative 12 Steps – A Secular Guide to Recovery](#). And in response to the Big Book, I wrote and published [The Little Book – A Collection of Alternative 12 Steps](#). This book contains 20 secular versions of the 12 Steps, four non-godly interpretations of each of them and, finally, an article on the origins of the 12 Steps.



Okay, one of the things I really wanted to say today is this: no one should push their beliefs on others. I mentioned earlier how that was done to me. It's wrong. It's awful.

In 2016 I launched an AA meeting which is held every Monday and Thursday at the Unitarian Universalist Church here in Hamilton. It's called "We Agnostics" – chapter 4 of the Big Book. There are people at these meetings who believe in a God. Others believe that God is Fiction. The folks at our meetings can believe whatever they want but they understand that they should not – and they do not – push it on others. We are all respectful of each other, regardless of our beliefs or non-beliefs.

Finally, I will try to answer one last question.

If I don't believe in a God, what do I think living my life is all about? That's the question I asked myself way back then, when I was 19 years old. Well, I'm going to be silly and mention my favorite band, The Beatles. Life to me is well described in the name of one of their albums. It's a Magical Mystery Tour. Surprisingly I enjoy each and every day. It's my tour. The magical mystery one. And the title of the last song on the album is "All You Need Is Love."

I agree. That's something we all need. Not Fiction.