

RELIGION: NONE

Gina Rodriguez

“Gina, you need to make your First Communion if you want to be recognized by the Church,” my father said, urging me to follow the footsteps of absolutely everyone around me.

“But, Dad, what if I don’t want to be recognized by the Church?” I replied, fearing his reaction. That was almost seven years ago.

My father dismissed my question at first, considering it to be just a phase of uncertainty and doubt that had hit me too soon. But I made him aware of how serious I was. I bluntly told him that I was not ready to give myself completely to the Catholic religion, and I doubted

that I ever would be. I pointed out the corruption that any fool could easily see in the Church, the contradictions that I found in the Bible, the hypocrisy that is extremely visible in many ‘pious’ people, and, most important of them all, that I had no reason to believe that God even existed.

Coming from a long line of devoted Catholics, it was hard for my father to accept my views. I know that he still does not agree with me, but I am grateful that he has at least come to terms with my view. I guess that knowing I wouldn’t change my mind and that he could not turn to my mother to back him up, he gradually became accustomed to my absence at Mass, not saying grace at the dinner table nor praying before bedtime, and my lack of knowledge about the religion.

My mother, on the other hand, was not surprised by my renouncing Catholicism. She had already seen her share; a mother, an aunt, two sisters, three brothers, and about a dozen nieces and nephews had converted to

one branch or another of Christianity. Yet it was nothing compared to my ‘conversion.’

I know that I was not the first one in my family to believe this way, but I was the first one to announce it and not live my life pretending. My sisters may have had their doubt, and even questioned God out loud, but it was just a mere whisper to my parents, unlike the shout I made at the top of my lungs.

If I had not moved to Mexico at such a young age I don’t think I would have been thinking this way. I would have continued going to church every weekend as well as Sunday school, and I would have attended a

private Catholic school just like my sisters had before me. But once our lives were abruptly forced to adapt to Guadalajara all that changed.

At first, we stopped attending Mass

every Sunday morning because my sister and I, not able to speak Spanish yet, couldn’t understand. The agreement was that once we learned, we would resume our weekend routine. But when that moment came, we didn’t. By then, both our parents were working seven days a week, which didn’t leave much time for morning Mass. With guilt weighing down on all our shoulders, our parents repeated what our previous priest had told us before we left Texas: you don’t need to attend church in order to continue being good Catholics, our faith in God and at-home-prayers would be sufficient. I believed that.

One day, in second grade, I brought a ham sandwich to school for lunch. When I began to eat it during recess, my best friend at the time looked at me in horror, pointed

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“God is a comedian playing to an audience too afraid to laugh.”

- Voltaire

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and shrieked at the top of her lungs, “What are you doing? Don’t you know what day it is? It’s Ash Wednesday!”

I replied with a simple, “So?”

“You’re not supposed to eat meat today!” she announced. When I informed her that I was very hungry and I did not have money to buy lunch, she began yelling for everyone to hear, “Gina doesn’t believe in God! Gina doesn’t believe in God!”

I argued with her, repeated that I did, and asked her to stop. She ignored me and continued spreading the news around. The next person to hear her vicious rumors was my art teacher. We didn’t talk much after that. Would my selfish need to feed myself send me to hell? It was then that I began to question my beliefs.

Many of my friends complain about how hard it is to pretend about their faith and continue ‘believing’ the way their parents want them to. Some even say they envy me for being able to be so open about my views and not fearing what people have to say. But they don’t see it from my prospective. I was

frightened about how my father would react as well as the rest of my family. I didn’t care much about what others besides them and close friends thought about me. But it is still hard to maintain my views in a dominantly Catholic country. Being frowned upon society, treated as if I were contagious, automatically being labeled a devil worshiper, I was shut out of many people’s lives because of my lack of faith.

I feel awkward and clumsy when I go to church for someone’s wedding, Communion, or *quinceaños*. The person sitting next to me points out little things that I had long forgotten: don’t cross your legs, don’t wear sleeveless shirts, stand up straight, kneel down, cross yourself. I don’t know any prayers or songs and I have never been to Confession. I no longer consider myself Catholic. When asked about what my religion is, I say, “None.” I don’t live my life pretending, nor do I apologize for offending anyone. They are my views and mine alone and not meant to influence anyone else.