

Losing My Religion

The holidays are over for another year. The marathon carols and cheesy Lifetime Christmas movies are over and everyone can stop the crazy shopping frenzies and maybe focus on something other than the six-hour sale at Fred Meyer and the extra 15 percent-off coupon for Macy's. Thank goodness, the bell ringers won't meet us at the door when we go into the grocery store and we can stop hearing about "The Assault on Christmas" conspiracy so popular with certain right-wing programs and publications. Their goal is to force all people, religious or otherwise, to focus on the "real meaning of Christmas." What is the real meaning of Christmas? Do those who profess to remember "Jesus is the Reason for the Season" even have a clue of what Christmas is really about or how it came to be? I don't think so.

Despite the stress to do Christmas well, I love many aspects of the holiday: I love to shop, I tear up every time I hear "Oh Holy Night" and I love Christmas trees. But I'm not religious—I am an agnostic who borderlines on atheist.

While shopping this year with my mother, she picked out a necklace for my daughter. It was a costumeey, Madonna-like crucifix on a chain, which are apparently once again in style. I said to my mother, "Please don't confuse her." She replied, "You'll have to explain that to me; you used to be such a Jesus freak." I was sur-



LIVING OUT LOUD

by Kathryn Martini

I regularly have shoved down my throat that my life, and whom I choose to love, is such a crime against God that I don't deserve the same rights that I had when I was married to a man.

It's true that when I was married and attempting to live the perfect suburban family life, my husband and I attended church regularly—and although it was an ecumenical-type liberal church, Jesus was at the center of the teachings. I believed there was one power in the universe—that of God, and I practiced my faith and did consider the religious nature of holidays. I didn't think myself a Jesus freak but was a strong believer in his teachings.

Over the last six years, I have grown away from that belief and the spiritual practices that

were once a strong center of my life. This process began when, while married, I had an affair with a woman, got a divorce and came out as a lesbian. I was told I was not welcome at my church—the scandal would be too upsetting to the other parishioners—at a time when I needed the support more than ever. I started to question whether or not there was good in all things and lost my ability to see this opportunity for growth, especially while blinded by depression and the gravity of my situation. I still maintained my faith in a God-type entity for a while—until I returned to college.

My quest to earn my degree and become an intellectual at 40 has allowed me to absorb the material I learn much differently than when I was 18. The history, sociology, psychology and literature I have learned all have religious beliefs as explanations for horrible treatment to whole races and populations including genocide, slavery, racial and gender discrimination and the withholding of basic civil rights to marginalized groups. As a gay American, I regularly have shoved down my throat that my life, and whom I choose to love, is such a crime against God that I don't deserve the same rights that I had when I was married to a man. I realize that all Christians don't believe this, but the groups that do have been loud enough to legalize discrimination against my family and me—all in the name of God and "His Word."

I choose to have no part of this and would prefer to focus on seeing the good in people and putting energy into being the best person I can be to myself and to others. I choose to leave God and Jesus out of it because, frankly, I don't want to associate with their followers. I have lost my religion but not my faith in humanity—despite the atrocities in the world.

And despite my change of heart, I celebrate the holidays—all which were hijacked from ancient rituals practiced long before anyone heard of a man named Jesus. My beliefs or lack thereof don't assault Christmas; I am acutely aware of its real meaning.

The tree is a bit of nature brought inside the house. The lights help to brighten the dark days of winter. The singing and the feasts bring friends and families together, and the gifts—well that's just about consumerism, but I still like those, too.

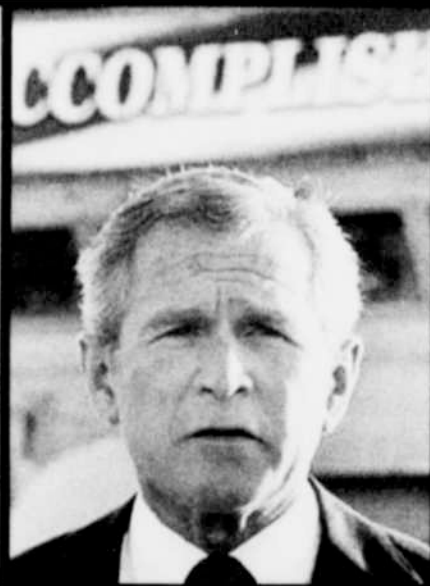
I can live my life and raise my children without needing to buy into the judgment of God, the guilt of sin or even the promise of an afterlife. My faith is in living a good life and treating others well. I know a few Christians who should perhaps try it out. ☐

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