Opinion

The Daily Campus

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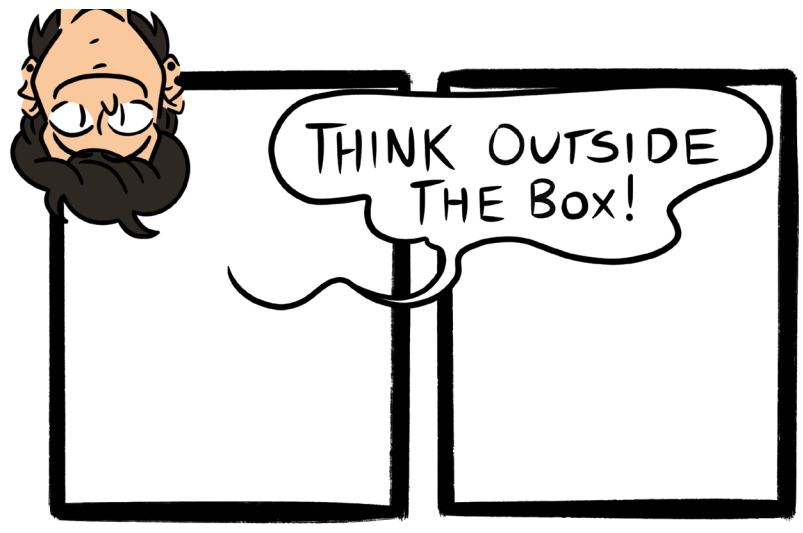
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COMIC BY CONNOR SZREJNA, STAFF ARTIST/THE DAILY CAMPUS

I wear my cross every day

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I catch myself touching the cross around my neck all the time.

It's not intentional, and usually I don't even realize I'm doing it until my fingers find the small metal pendant resting against my chest, tracing its edges, or twirling the leather collar. It's a gift from my father, which he received from his own. I remember being surprised he would gift such a thing to me. A firm agnostic, my father was raised by two traditional Puerto Rican Roman Catholics, and upon my upbringing, I received a similar push into the church.

I was baptized at only a few months old, following tradition. Catechism every Sunday, years of lessons before I was allowed to take my First Communion. Eventually pondering a confirmation name, like I was stepping into a version of myself that belonged permanently to the faith.

But belief, at least for me, never truly clicked.

Even as a kid, I was the kind of person who liked knowing how things worked. I loved science classes, documentaries and having the world make a little more sense than it did the day before. When religion was preached to me, I tried to approach it the same way: asking questions, looking for explanations, trying to understand the logic behind it.

But consistently, the answers I got were different from the ones I had grown used to. Instead of evidence, there was faith. Believe that it is true, as that's the least you can do to appreciate the miracle of humanness that God has bestowed upon you.

I continued to ask questions, about miracles, about why some prayers were answered and others weren't, about how God could be everywhere at once but also watching closely enough to care whether I missed mass. I just wanted explanations.

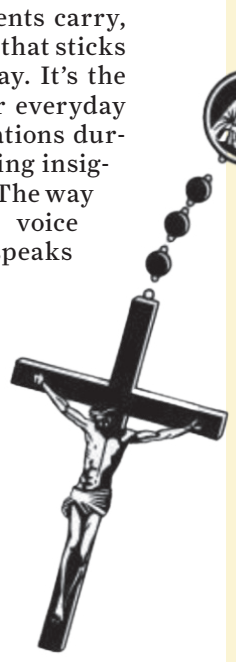
For a while, this led to extreme anxiety.

If belief was supposed to come naturally, what did it mean that it didn't for me? I remember sitting in church and watching everyone bow their heads in prayer, wondering if something was wrong with me for not understanding. Was I doing it wrong? The language around me never felt neutral. Doubt became distance, and distance from God meant sin.

Now, as I've grown older and life has caught up to me, I can't help but find myself reaching for the idea of faith once more. Not in a religious way, per se, but the element of tradition and culture that I once was surrounded by.

Doctrine is made of absolutes. It asks you to accept truths handed down from somewhere higher than yourself. Culture, however, is a collective. It's music and language and morality that's been passed down for generations. It's saying bendición to my grandparents when answering their phone calls, and knowing the stories of the Bible by heart. It's the small cross resting on my chest.

When I think about the faith my grandparents carry, it isn't the doctrine that sticks out to me right away. It's the way it shapes their everyday lives. Rosary recitations during car rides, hanging insignias in their home. The way my grandmother's voice softens when she speaks about trusting in God, with a steady kind of reassurance that things will somehow be okay.



I admire the fact they have found comfort in life as a part of something larger and more meaningful. I can't say I share their belief in that way, and I still find myself returning to the same questions that unsettled me as a child. But I can recognize the comfort that faith gives them, and I often find myself longing for that same sense of steadiness.

I can still hum the music played during mass from memory, and the stories of saints and miracles have shaped my moral framework. Spiritually, I might not live inside doctrine, but I can find the remnants of it in the way I care for others.

Maybe that's why I still wear the cross.

Not a declaration of belief, but as a connection to the world I was raised in. To my father, who once owned it himself, and to the grandparents who tried their hardest to make sure I was raised in the church. To a culture that shaped me before I had the language to question it.

And sometimes, without thinking, my fingers still reach for it. And in that small, absent gesture, I feel something close to what faith might be.

GRAPHIC CREATED BY VECTORPORTAL.COM

Lead Us Not into Manipulation, and Deliver Us From Evil

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Growing up in the Catholic Church, one of the first lessons I learned was The 10 Commandments, which were touted as some of the greatest of God's laws handed down to Moses directly. However, one always stuck out to me as particularly frustrating. It was also the one I most often broke. That is the third commandment: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."

As a child I was told that it meant not to swear using God's name. No "Jesus Christ!" no "Oh my God!" no "Good heavens!" All of these were strictly off limits. But let's be real here, compared to the severity of "Thou shalt not kill," (Exodus 20:13) or "Thou shalt not covet," (Exodus 20:15) a little swearing hardly seems to matter. Especially when these curses cannot even be made towards another person.

You may be asking yourself, why would God — if you believe in such things — or the writers of the Bible include taking the Lord's name in vain as one of the cardinal sins? Well, this is because there are far more important aspects to that commandment than cursing.

If we look back through the historical practice of Christianity, as well as other portions of the Bible, we can discern three other aspects of taking the Lord's name in vain: making false oaths or promises in God's name, recitation and use of God's name without having faith and using the name of God to justify an action against the character of God.

Let's break these down. First, false oaths. When a preacher claims that for a certain amount of "donations," they will use the power of God to cure a terminal illness or turn someone straight, that is a false oath. These people have no power to create miracles. They merely use the name of God to trick people. Second, recitation without faith. When a politician is making a speech at a rally, or a preacher is standing on the pulpit, and interspliced within every sentence are praises of God, they are using the Lord's name in vain. They do not give God reverence in that moment, if ever. They simply use the word of God to get their believers to follow their cause. This leads into the final aspect, using God's name to act against the Lord's will. When an anti-abortion politician says in accordance with God, he will enact legislation to police women's bodily autonomy, or when a multimillionaire person asks for money from the less fortunate to further the Lord's work, they are acting against God and therefore violating the commandment.

So, if these other parts of taking God's name in vain are so important, then why were we never taught them? The reason is simple. Those who are in power do not find these aspects advantageous to teach. For one, it is much easier to enforce rules rather than a moral code. If you hear someone swear, you know they broke a rule. If someone is using worship of God as a tool rather than as a genuine expression of faith, that is much harder to determine. Additionally, it creates an easy ingroup and outgroup that a leader can capitalize on.

A leader who wants control over their followers must make their flock of sheep docile. If the people are searching for hypocrisy, empty words and false oaths from the lips of a preacher or politician, it threatens their power. It promotes critical thinking and skepticism, which is something they cannot allow. If they did, it would be much easier for Christians to find the wolves in sheep's clothing among them.

Why is my church — which is supposed to stay out of politics — funneling money into political campaigns? Why is my pastor endorsing a candidate for office and saying that candidate is ordained by God to win? Why is my government claiming to be a Christian government, while at the same time stoking hatred of immigrants, who Christ says should be treated as a neighbor?

The third commandment is merely one example of how religion, particularly Christianity, in this country is less worshipped but rather utilized for selfish and worldly purposes. From tithing to touching kids, the word of Christ has been perverted. What mattered far more to Christ than any rule on cursing, eating meat on Fridays or wearing two types of cloth was a moral code of love. In Peter 3:8, Jesus proclaims, "...all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble." When that message is not only shared by Christian leaders but put into practice, worship will not be hollow but hallowed instead.