

Elizabeth Rennert

Faith Statement

Daniel and the Lion's Den, Noah's Ark, David and Goliath, Adam and Eve, and the Creation story. I was taught each of the stories, and many others, every year in Sunday school, from Kindergarten to 8th grade. And I've always seen them as just that, stories. When I was younger, I thought they were along the lines of the Berenstain Bears, or Eloise, just entertaining stories. As I got older, I realized people actually believed and found meaning in these tales. They were more than just long-lasting bedtime stories. I didn't get it though. I didn't understand how people believed these things actually happened, when even in my 10-year-old mind, they were clearly impossible.

This was how I went through Sunday school: making crosses out of popsicle sticks and pretending to believe the stories I was told. I mastered the art of answering questions that were, in my opinion, flawed. I tried to come up with the right answer to what God looked like, and where he lived. We were always told there was no wrong answer and yet, "I don't think there is a God so I can't answer" didn't seem like what they were looking for. So I learned to say that God was like a cloud, or a breath, or a gust of wind. That he was invisible and lived up in the sky. I learned to say that I saw him in nature, and in my family and friends, and in love. But more than that, I learned to say that I saw him everywhere. That rollercoaster I rode over the summer, God was in somehow. The tree growing in my backyard was, of course, the work of God. And that 100% on my spelling test must be because God was feeling particularly nice that day, not because I was good at spelling.

That bothered me. It seemed like this “God person” was taking credit for everything. Every achievement or creation was being ascribed to God, when in reality, the work of a human or just the natural world made it possible. That rollercoaster was designed by an engineer and made a reality by builders. Not God. God had nothing to do with it. That tree was growing because someone planted a seed and the soil provided it with adequate nutrients. Not because God decided he wanted a tree there. And I got the 100 because I was good at spelling and because I studied. Not because some mythical being in the sky that I don’t even believe in wanted me to do well. All of the so-called “miracles”, impressive feats, and wonders that people use as proof of God are just improbable not impossible. They can be explained using science or logic. And which is more believable: Mountains exist because an all-powerful, all-knowing being put them there, or that tectonic plates converged and buckled, something we have scientific evidence of.

I get that some bible stories can be used as parables or analogies that relate to everyday life and teach useful lessons, but lots of stories don’t seem to have morals to teach us. David and Goliath teaches that an underdog can win, but what does Daniel in the Lion’s Den teach us. If you trust enough, you won’t get hurt? What kind of lesson is that to teach little kids? You’re invincible if you believe in God.

What good comes from having a creation story that directly contradicts evolution—something proven to be true? What good comes from having a story where Jesus cures a man of leprosy, something that doesn’t just happen like that with a single touch? All that comes from stories of miracles is false hope, something people don’t need

in their life. Eventually they will be let down by this god they have worshipped and then what? What becomes of the people who are led to believe in a god that then lets them down?

Before we had the technology and scientific knowledge that we have today, God was the perfect answer to why we are here and why things are the way they are. But now, we have far better explanations for the world being the way it is. God is no longer a good explanation for the world, it's God that now requires explaining.

Back in 2011, when I was 9, I decided that I wanted to be baptized. Each year baptism would be taught in Sunday school and I felt left out, having been one of few kids not baptized as an infant. I made the decision to be baptized to fit in. Now, at age 15, I realize that decisions about religion and beliefs are your decision and your decision alone. For this reason, I will not be getting confirmed.

That was my faith statement as of Sunday morning. I was confident in my decision and, why shouldn't I have been? I participated in confirmation and came to my decision on my own. But someone whose opinion I respect greatly told me that I had made a mistake. And I had.

This whole year, I went through confirmation with the attitude that it would take a whole lot of indisputable evidence to prove to me that God exists and that I should be confirmed. And that wasn't actually the point. The question is whether or not I want to join TriCon church. What does TriCon church mean to me?

The answer is a whole lot. I've been coming here since I was 5, so for 10 years. I went through the Sunday school program, the Seekers program and am now part of the

Youth Group. This church means something to me and I don't know how to put it into words, but I'll try. Despite the fact that I openly don't believe in God or prayer, I am still welcome here. The people in the congregation still see me as a TriCon kid. I come to church two or three times every week, for youth group, discussion group and various other events. Each Sunday afternoon I make a point of having all my homework done so that I can make it to youth group, one of the highlights of my week. We don't pray or discuss religion there, and yet it feels like the most genuine TriCon experience. It's a group of teenagers having fun, playing games and just hanging out. Everyone is accepted there and can be themselves without fear of ridicule. That is what makes this church special. It's the people. It's coffee hour, mingling with adults, many of whom know me and some of whom don't. It's the little kids in the nursery who I play blocks with. It's my fellow classmates, who I see in a different perspective at church. It's all the traditions we have—field day, the easter egg hunt, the 11 o'clock Christmas Eve service. All of these are centered around people—people that you don't find just anywhere. "TriCon is an open and affirming congregation", I've heard over and over again. But until recently, I didn't really get it. What that means is that I'm welcome, even though I don't believe in God and probably never will. The community here will always mean a lot to me. For this reason, I would like to join the TriCon church.