

The Act of Contrition

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I attended an all-girls Catholic high school in the Bel-Air neighborhood of Los Angeles, California called Marymount High School. For four years I was taught and nurtured in the way that Marymount saw fit. I loved my high school, and I found that I was very prepared when I came to college, but only academically. Despite the feminism that was shoved down my throat from the moment I began my time there, Marymount was still very sexist and outdated. It wasn't until I got to college that I realized how unprepared I really was for the social aspect of college, as well as how blind I had been to my own manipulation by my high school's administration. However, I am not completely faultless in this situation. I was not the perfect Marymount girl; I did not take parts of my education seriously and I openly defied my school's administration countless times. So before I begin my letter to the Marymount administration, I would, in the Catholic tradition, like to give confession.

Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned. My last confession was whenever Marymount last forced me to confess in our gym. First of all, I am sorry for never being in dress uniform. I can't even begin to imagine how many group photos were ruined because my navy polo and khaki skirt stood out against everyone else's white polo and grey skirt.

Next, I would like to apologize for always being in detention. Although I have to say that I really enjoyed it. I once spent an hour inhaling helium with my best friend while blowing up balloons as punishment for being out uniform. True, Ms. Dykeman later came along and appointed herself Dean of Discipline and ruined it for everyone, but it was fun while it lasted.

I'm sorry for playing Angry Birds in Mass all of the time. I am sorry that I studied for tests, read, played hangman, and slept during Mass. I know I was told repeatedly that, even though we were in our school gym, we were still in a place of God. Then again, we held class meetings to discuss senior parking privileges in our chapel, so forgive me for not taking the service too seriously. I am also sorry for failing to conceal my boredom during Mass, especially when we had guests and we were supposed to be on our best behavior. I understand that Marymount is a Catholic school, but I found Mass incredibly mind-numbing and pointless, so I looked for ways to entertain myself.

I would also like to take this time to apologize for naming my flour baby Fernando Swaggity Swag. I realize that was not the most mature decision, but I felt an assignment so stupid – carrying around a sack of flour to teach us that taking care of a newborn is hard – warranted an equally stupid response. I also apologize for protesting my wedding assignment – planning a Catholic wedding, complete with Bible verses, a groom, and a budget for my final grade in my Christian Life and Love class – and turning it in two months late. I found the assignment to be so incredibly degrading and sexist that I refused to do it until my graduation depended on it.

I am sorry I felt the need to rebel against the practices I disagreed with, and I am sorry for making life difficult for the Marymount administration. For these and all the sins of my life, I am sorry.

But here is what you should be sorry for.

You should be sorry that in my four years of high school, I received one hour of sex-ed class each year. The most informative of which came freshmen year when Kaiser Permanente performed a musical about safe sex that involved a song and dance routine demonstrating how to put on a condom by rolling an eight-foot-long condom onto an equally as long banana. It's no wonder that a large amount of girls get pregnant after they graduate; they were completely unprepared for the environment that you so unceremoniously dropped them into. There wasn't a safe place to turn to for help or advice. You left us uninformed about sexual health and safe sex and discouraged girls from asking questions. You should be ashamed that I received the majority of my sexual education through my friends, and not through you.

You should be absolutely mortified that you spent four years nurturing your students and growing them into strong, independent, and inspired females and then turned around and taught them how to be good Christian wives. You should apologize for forcing second semester seniors to spend three hours and forty-five minutes every week learning how to have healthy Catholic marriages. Instead of teaching us valuable skills like how to balance a checkbook or write a resume, you indoctrinated us with a curriculum from the Stone Ages. The wedding assignment was code for: you need to get married and have babies right away. I am not exaggerating when I say I have never felt more confined and more powerless in my life than I did when I was in that class. You taught us it was selfish to put our careers above finding a husband and keeping him happy.

And another thing, what does it say about you as a school when your most famous and successful graduates are the Kardashians? What does it say about the way you prepare your students for the world? You should feel even more ashamed of this because of your Empowering Women series. You brought incredible speakers to talk to us about the struggles women face every day and to inspire us to achieve great things. Geena Davis came and talked to us about the gender disparity in lead female roles in show business. Massy Tadjedin came and talked to us about being the first female, Iranian director and how she rose above the gender stereotypes and broke through the glass ceiling. Nell Scovell, the co-author of *Lean In*, came and talked to us about gender inequality in the workplace and how her book started a national dialogue about combating sexism. These speakers, all of them incredibly accomplished women, kindled a fire inside of all of us, which you promptly extinguished with your sexist teachings. You fed me this strange combination of feminism mixed with firm Catholic principles, which only served to emphasize the twisted hypocrisy of the school and confused us all. You built me up, only to tell me it didn't matter how successful I was, how intelligent, how accomplished, or how educated because at the end of the day, I am still a woman, and my place is by my husband's side.

You dedicated one week every year to talking about bullying and meanness in girls. You had really important speakers come and talk to us about bullying. We watched documentaries, did trust exercises, and all of these very pointless things to end bullying at Marymount. Yet, you did absolutely nothing when two freshmen, Sally Smith and Jane Doe, sued each other. They were social rivals and decided that suing each other for harassment, bullying, and emotional distress

would be the best way to get rid of the other one. They filed restraining orders against each other and divided the entire grade. Everyone in the school knew neither of the girls were victims of bullying and that the lawsuits were complete fabrications. In fact, it was the exact opposite. Jane and Sally were the bullies in the grade; they made fun of the girls on financial aid, intimidated girls into doing their work for them, and took pleasure in causing their classmates pain. My younger sister, who is in their grade, has described the two of them on multiple occasions as being “complete and total evil bitch monsters” who spread rumors and lies about their classmates in hopes of getting more people on their respective sides. But Marymount, your response was worse than doing absolutely nothing: you re-arranged the schedules for every girl in the grade so Sally and Jane wouldn’t be in any classes together. You preached against bullying, but avoided addressing the issue when it happened right under your nose. Instead, you reinforced how we should all be subservient to others by making us change our schedules to accommodate these two bullies. For these and all the sins in your education methods, you should be sorry.

It is customary that after confession you recite the Act of Contrition (an apology to God). Unfortunately, I couldn’t recite it if my life depended on it. So I will improvise: Please don’t interpret my criticism of your teaching methods as hatred for Marymount itself; I loved every minute I spent at Marymount, and it gave me some of the most incredible gifts. It is because of Marymount that I am the person I am today, and I am incredibly grateful for that. I made best friends I will have for the rest of my life. I joined mock trial and found my voice. I joined the robotics team and realized just how much I was capable of and what I could achieve. I will accomplish great things both *because of* and *in spite of* you. I want to say I survived Catholic school un-scathed; but even though that is not remotely true, I think it is for the best.