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Confessions of a Christian Idiot

In the early days of my Christian experience, I had a debilitating case of Christian idiocy. *Christian idiocy* is a relationally toxic and dangerous mix of sincerity, ignorance, zeal and self-righteousness.

Rita, my wife, and I spent the first thirteen years of our Christian experience in a hyper-separatist group for whom everything but breathing was a sin, and that could only be done between ten and noon on Sundays. Okay, some hyperbole there, but not by much!

Out of a sincere, but misguided understanding, we were trained (with proof texts in hand) to avoid contamination that would assuredly come by associating with non-believers. That included family members.

We were taught to leave contact with nonbelievers to the Baptists. We were taught that Baptists and other preached the “nominal gospel,” but we proclaimed the “deeper things of God.” After all, “the

Bible says,” (sigh—the bane of proof-texting and rabid typology!) the Gentiles will come to the light of our rising. So, if we just shine brightly enough, we don’t have to worry mixing with the unwashed masses of humanity, God will bring them to us.

Our wanna-be clever one-liner was: “The Baptists will catch the fish, but we will clean them up.” My brain cramps even recounting this, but it is the truth. Not only is this horrifyingly bad theology, it is also a formula for unhealthy human relationships.

As toxic as this was, I cannot blame my *Christian idiocy* solely on what others did to me or what others taught me. In that message, my own personal brokenness found a sense of wellness and elitism. In many ways, I did not know any better.

However, I was afraid to confront authority figures. I also needed the fellowship for my self-perceived needs of socialization. As the saying goes: It takes two to tango. If

my soul had not been so needy, I would not have swallowed the bait. It was spiritual Velcro: a toxic message hooking to an unwell soul.

This meant, if at all possible: no family celebrations (birthdays, anniversaries) and no holiday celebrations. If unavoidable, we were taught such celebrations should be reluctantly endured as tossing a sop to the dregs of humanity who were beneath our spiritual brilliance. As you might guess, my *Christian idiocy* caused great harm in our extended family, especially to my wife’s siblings.

FROM ABANDONMENT TO HEALING

Rita was one of eleven children. Her father abandoned the family when the youngest was an infant. Having POA (Power of Attorney) for his elderly parents, he literally sold his parents’ home out from under them, kicked them to the curb, took everything they had and hooked up with another woman out of state and propagated a half dozen or so more children: not a poster boy for sons or fathers.

The family went from prosperous restaurateurs to welfare overnight. On the heels of this, when she was eighteen, Rita’s mother passed away from cancer on Christmas day. Her mother’s dying request was for Rita to promise to take care of the siblings.

Rita went from sister to

mother overnight—to a family only a few years younger than herself. Needless to say, such a dynamic presented lots of opportunities for deeply hurting one another.

Combine this much later with our own marital issues and the toxic holiness of our first church affiliation, and it should come as no surprise that thirty years of relational alienation resulted. Fast forward through forty-three years of the grace of God and His transforming love working in our lives.

Seven or eight years ago we visited someone in the Dallas, Texas area. One of Rita's younger sisters lived in the area. Rita took a longshot chance and reached out to her for a visit. Her sister took a longshot chance and said yes.

That began a difficult and honest adult process of mutual repentance, forgiveness, and understanding. At that time, little did we know that seven or eight years later we would be moving to Texas, literally twenty minutes from where her sister lived! Thirty years of alienation, erased! A sister and a friend recovered, plus geographic proximity!

Rita's older sister also happened to move to the area. She heard of the renewal of relationship of her younger sisters. So with trepidation she took a chance and agreed to meet with Rita. In the middle of a series of pleasant, but tentative, rebuilding connections, this sister and her husband had a life-changing encounter with Christ.

CATHOLIC MASS... SERIOUSLY?

In her joy of conversion, Rita's sister asked if Rita would attend a Catholic mass with her! Now wait, just a minute! For conservative Protestants like us, Catholics were suspect—if Christians at all. Rita accepted.

Rita participated fully in the service (except communion), and observed her sister weeping with joy that they were being restored and could share a common experience of Christ.

Rita took it a step further. She decided to buy her sister a very expensive and engraved rosary to celebrate her sister's new birth! That would never have happened in our days of *Christian idiocy*. I mean after all, how could I encourage someone in a "false religion" and endorse "unbiblical practices"?

I will tell you. When love compels you. When care for another human being outranks your own need for perceived doctrinal purity. When love triumphs over *idiocy*. When love is the highest virtue, at the apex of your inner truth hierarchy, it is not only an easy thing to do, but it is the obvious thing to do. Love never fails.

Well, the gift of the rosary pushed things over the top. It is something Rita's sister will treasure forever. Her sister said it was the kindest thing any human being had ever done for her! Imagine that—the transformative and liberating power of human kindness—love extended for love's sake, needing no reciprocation or

agreement in doctrine. Jesus was willing to go to a manger, a cross, and a grave to win us. How far are we willing to go?

To wrap up the story, it's a "two-for-one deal": thirty years of relational alienation between sisters overturned, relationship reclaimed, and sisterly happiness for all. When considering this marvelous family story, Rita encapsulated the dynamic in one pithy sentence:

"It took God thirty years to make me safe and to make them ready."

There is a universe of insight in that simple sentence.

Christian idiocy is dangerous—unsafe—poisonous. *Christian idiocy* alienates us from others and betrays the Lord and the gospel that we profess. John said it this way:

He that does not love, does not know God.

If you or a loved one suffers (or has suffered) from a bad case of *Christian idiocy*, take heart. Don't lose hope. Don't burn your relational bridges. You can never know when God's powerful, transforming, grace and love will reach you and/or another person. Isn't that the nature of God's wild goose grace?

The ancient Celtic Symbol of the Holy Spirit was a wild goose. The idea behind the symbol was that God's grace, given by the Holy Spirit, is neither controllable nor predictable. □

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