

## **Fundamentally Loathsome – Unused Intros**

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Sundays were the worst.

Okay, Tuesday nights were bad, too. Tuesdays were CCD, which stood for “Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.” Not that I ever remembered; I asked my mom every few years, but the information never stuck in my head. I resented it too much. (Still do. I’ll probably have forgotten it again by the time this book is published.) I’m pretty sure it was what other churches called catechism. All it meant to me was that my Tuesday evenings were blown to hell because my mother was putting me through the Catholic rigors.

Still, that wasn’t as bad as Sunday mornings. See, Tuesdays were already fucked because I’d been at school all day. But at least Sundays had potential in theory, since I didn’t have to go to school, and could sleep in. But, no. Whichever parent I was with that weekend would wake me up early, force to put on the “nice” clothes with the collars I hated so much (because participatory has always been a game of one-upmanship) and drag me to nine o’clock Mass at a Catholic Church across town.

The service was over by ten, and the post-ritualistic socializing of my current parental unit was typically through by eleven. Sometimes we’d go to brunch afterwards at some place like TGI Friday’s, which was cool, but more often we’d just go home. Even though I’d typically have the afternoon and evening to myself, it didn’t matter. The day was shot. There was no way I could be productive, or even really enjoy myself. All I could do was count the minutes until it was the time that I normally got home from school, at which point it ceased feeling like the weekend and my depression increased. To this day, late Sunday afternoon light depresses me, even now when I have a job that I enjoy.

It was from going to church that I developed the habit of always having a book on me. I picked it up from my oldest brother Jim, who would read until the last possible moment, usually our mother telling him to put it away because the service was starting.

Aside from being able to get in some reading time, the other respite from the deadly banality of Catholic Mass was the Children's Liturgy. Shortly before the sermon began--but *after* what felt like an eternity of sitting and kneeling and sitting and standing and kneeling and standing and sitting and then doing the whole thing over again--anyone under the age of consent was sent out of the main chapel into a smaller room where we were given a dumbed-down version of the Bible readings. At least there, I could usually get a bit more reading done. It also provided me with the means to avoid the rest of Mass.

Painfully shy, I hated the ritual of exiting the chapel, since there was no way to do it without being seen by the entire congregation, and I was convinced they were all looking at *me*, this tall misfit boy.

Worse than that was *returning* to our seats after the Children's Liturgy was over. After a while, I realized that I could get away with *not* returning to my seat in the chapel. Instead, I lurked around the back entrance, paying nominal attention. I really wanted to just leave, to go into the lounge and read until the service was over, but I just knew someone would narc on me to my parents. At least if I was standing in the back, or even just drifting around just outside the doors, I had plausible deniability.

The suckitude of Sundays took on a whole new dimension when, as a teenager, I graduated from CCD to "youth group." This meant that not only were Sunday mornings shot, but then I'd have to turn around and go *back* to church that night. I was never home for the first season of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* as a

result, instead having to tape it and watch it later. Okay, I would have taped it anyway, but thanks to youth group I wasn't home to delete the commercials. As much as anything, that led to my rejection of God, the bastard.

Though I had to go, I did everything I could to resist church indoctrination. Baptism wasn't my idea, nor was First Communion. There had been talk about me becoming an altar boy, just like my closest brother had been. It was taken as almost a given that I would be. I found the thought to be completely heinous, and wanted nothing to do with it. Wearing the robe, everybody watching, having to remember all the steps? More pressure than I could handle. In a display of self-determination which was downright uncharacteristic for me at that age, I made it clear that I did *not* want to be an altar boy, and the bullet was successfully dodged.

First Confession was also my Last. I went into the booth and softpedaled like mad, confessing to having negative thoughts about the kids who would pick on me at school. What, did anyone think I was going to tell this guy about the *really* bad things I'd done, about my genuine misdeeds, the ones I'd managed to cover up? Or that I was fascinated by the concepts of cross-dressing and changing sex, that I was already spending hours researching the subjects, that deep down I knew I wasn't really a boy? Not goddamned likely.

The last couple years of CCD lead up to Confirmation. It never happened, because my will eventually grew stronger than my mother's, which also accounts for why my hair started to grow long around that time. However grudgingly, she began to accept that in spite of her best and certainly well-intentioned efforts, I would never be the short-haired Confirmed Catholic she so wanted me to be. Youth Group was, perhaps, the last attempt to bring me into the fold, for me to accept the gift she felt she was giving me.

Sunday nights in the newly built part of the church, sleek and modern and fluorescent compared to the whitewashed brick of the main building. The tone of Youth Group was different from CCD, looser, more geared towards “the youth,” teenagers, us. We even had the occasional all-nighters, sleepovers with food and snacks and music and horror movies (like *The Hitcher*, the movie with Rutger Hauer as a psycho where Jennifer Jason Leigh is torn asunder offscreen) and, of course, a Ouija board. Kid you not. The notion that horror movies or occult board games were somehow un-xtian was of no concern to me, and in fact didn’t cross my mind at all.

In addition to separating a fourteen year-old boy from his *Star Trek*, which is bad enough, the most difficult part of Youth Group was that, for some reason, some old friends from my first elementary school were there. I’m not sure why, since they didn’t actually go to my church. But there they were, people I hadn’t seen since the fourth grade when my mother and I moved into a different school district. It was not exactly a joyous reunion. After four years, we were going in different directions, and didn’t get along so well. It was a pattern that would repeat many times over the years, but usually without the element of lost contact.

As it often will, Salvation came from a secular force. When I was sixteen, in 1989, I started working until midnight on Saturday nights. My mother either took pity on me or admitted defeat (possibly both), and stopped getting me out of bed on Sunday morning. She expressed some hope that when I no longer worked late on Saturdays that I might return to church. I can’t fault her for trying.

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I was the youngest of four. Though my mother took us all to church, it only really seemed to stick with my brother Tom. The rest of us ended up atheists, much to her chagrin.

Not that she was too thrilled with Tom. While he'd always shown more interest in religion than the rest of us combined, his real passion was drugs. The first time he got clean, he replaced the junk with Jesus. (I use the word "junk" for its alliterative properties; in fact, he never did heroin. But he did plenty of coke and speed, eventually graduating to crack.) Religion was like another controlled substance, and he dove into with the same ferocity, so much so that at times he felt his own mother was going to Hell because she was a Catholic. And that kinda went without saying for the rest of us, since we didn't so much as make a pretense of knowing his God or anyone else's.

Still, getting clean is getting clean. Better Tom be alive, Bible in hand and filled with piss and the Holy Spirit than be dead in a gutter, crack pipe in hand and covered in piss and filth.

Just so long as I didn't have to hear about it.

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