

THE GRAND INQUISITION

A Play by Peter C. Venable

## THE GRAND INQUISITION

### Cast of Characters

SOPHIA, female defendant, plump, 40ish, prisoner's garb, bruise on right cheek

BARTHOLOMEW, a small male defendant, prisoner's garb, arm in a sling

SUPREME JUDGE, male with glasses, masked

JUDGE 2, male, masked

JUDGE 3, male, masked

ATTORNEY

GUARDS (2) with automatic weapons, military, masked

SCIENTIST

RABBI

EXTRAS, bomb squad, firemen, medics, armed individuals,

At RISE:

(A room is hastily and sparsely arranged into a courtroom. Facing the audience is a judicial tribunal platform, seated well above the stage and facing the audience. Each has a microphone. On the left is a table with two chairs. On the right is a table with a single chair. A video camera on a tripod is on the right, facing the defendant's table. A man walks to the video camera, makes adjustments, polishes the lens).

MAN

Well, it's on and should last for the trial. (He leaves the stage. An armed guard enters on the right and stands behind the prosecutor's table. He looks at and checks his weapon, then stares toward the other side of the stage.)

GUARD

Bring in the criminals! (An armed guard escorts 2 shackled prisoners, who shuffles to the table with their lawyer and sit. A not-too-intense spotlight clicks on and shines on the couple throughout the trial.)

GUARDS (both simultaneously shout): This most illustrious court is now in session, in the year 2,094 on the 10th of April. All rise! (Three judges enter from the right side, march to their seats and sit. All but the guards sit.)

SUPREME JUDGE

Man, identify yourself, what you do, and your crime.

BARTHOLOMEW

I am Bartholomew Stemkowski and I work repairing computers. I am innocent in God's eyes.

SUPREME JUDGE

Woman, identify yourself, what you do, and your crime.

SOPHIA

I am Sophia Van Hecke, and I work as a merchant, selling furniture products.

JUDGE 2

What is your crime?

SOPHIA

We were reading our bible in the basement of a house, when I suppose a mob of guards saw us through our basement window and broke in, rushed down the stairs yelling and cursing and knocked us with their guns—

JUDGE 3

Shut up! What is your crime?

SOPHIA

Reading the Bible?

JUDGE 2

And being a Christian, which is illegal in our country.

SOPHIA

So you say. (The guard places the muzzle of his gun to her head, then jabs her with it)

GUARD

Only answer the honorable judge's questions, criminal.

ATTORNEY

How can my client answer with this intimidation?

JUDGE 2

You better advise her immediately. (The attorney whispers into her ear.)

JUDGE 3

How does the criminal plead?

SOPHIA

Guilty as charged.

BARTHOLOMEW

Guilty of my faith.

ATTORNEY

Most honorable judges—

SUPREME JUDGE

Silence! (Pauses, then reads the following.) We will proceed to prove this Christian religion was a sham from the beginning, and in the words of the Roman Gaius Secundud, was and is “a depraved and excessive superstition.” Then we will prove that you, woman, a professing Christian, is a hypocrite of the first degree.” (Looks up at her)

JUDGE 2

Call in the state’s sovereign scientist. (A woman, carrying a clipboard, enters on the right and sits in front of a microphone. The armed guard behind her leans over and whispers into her ear. She gets a pen and writes something on her pad, then looks at the tribunal. )

JUDGE 3

What is your name and occupation?

SCIENTIST

I am Dr. Dofflemoyer and I have degrees in biology, genetics, and medicine.

SUPREME JUDGE

Impressive! For the benefit of these . . . outlaws . . . enlighten them as to why science shows that Christianity is purely and wholly a massive delusion based on, at best, an illusion of a ghost, an Elvis sighting as they said in America a long time ago.

SCIENTIST

We should give these ignorant fanatics a commonly understood definition of science. (She puts on her glasses and reads)

“Science is the observation, identification, description, experimental investigation, and theoretical explanation of phenomena. Such activities are restricted to a class of natural phenomena, and are applied to an object of inquiry or study. There are usually rigorous experiments, apprehension of data, and community conformation or rejection. Thus, we are really speaking about the scientific method.” (Looks up at the judge.)

SUPREME JUDGE

Commendable. So, doctor, how scientific is this Christian religion?

SCIENTIST

There is an old expression, what is non-science is nonsense. (laughter)

SOPHIA

(Sophia stands.) I wish to submit before the honorable judges that the issue is not this religion or any religion, but rather the question is this: was Jesus resurrected from the dead? This is the only question that matters; otherwise, Christianity is indeed a superstition and worse, a fraud. (The guard rushes around the table and faces Sophia, aiming his rifle a few inches from her head)

GUARD

Impertinent bitch!

JUDGE 3

Guard, at ease. We will dictate these proceedings, not you. (The guard returns to behind the defendant's table.)

JUDGE 2

Sit down, zealot! Speak into the microphone.

SOPHIA

(The attorney hands her a sheet of paper.)

I wish to read a prepared statement: (reads) "I am certain that this esteemed tribunal, your Excellency, that we owe it to you that we enjoy unbroken peace, and it is due to your provident care that, in all ways and in all sorts of places, improvements are being made for the good of the nation. The distinguished scientist embraces that only materialism and naturalism is real. That is, reality is only what can be observed, measured, and proved—by science. Science denies the supernatural—unless and until it can be proved by the scientific method." (Looks up.) Madam scientist, how can the scientific method prove the proposition, only what science proves, is true? How can science prove that is true?

(The scientist's mouth opens, clears her throat, looks down and mutters something inaudible.)

SOPHIA

Can science prove God exists—or does not exist?

SCIENTIST

That is beyond the scientific method.

SOPHIA

Can science prove that Jesus of Nazareth never existed?

SCIENTIST

Well, no.

SOPHIA

Can science prove Jesus never was resurrected from the dead?

SCIENTIST

It is unnaturally impossible for a dead human—proved dead—to become alive.

SOPHIA

What about a supernatural power, a force that can act within and beyond the laws of nature and physics, who raised Jesus from a brutally beaten, crucified, speared body into a living flesh-and-blood body and a spiritual body?

SCIENTIST

There is no proof. Can you prove Jesus was resurrected from the dead?

SOPHIA

Can you prove that Julius Caesar lived? What sort of experimental investigation and observation can you use to prove Caesar was no more than a mythological creation?

SCIENTIST

We only have written accounts.

SOPHIA

The same is true with Jesus—partly. How many believe in Caesar today?

ATTORNEY

(Standing) Your Excellency, the court has been patient and generous in indulging this defendant's meandering. We know this nefarious crime is not frivolous in the eyes of this court.

JUDGE 2

Ah—the attorney is resurrected. We were wondering if during this time you have been calculating the extent of your client's bill.

ATTORNEY

The court is in good humor today.

SOPHIA

Your Excellency, I wish to fire my attorney.

BARTHOLOMEW

Me, too.

JUDGE 3

Why? (Both guards point their guns, waist level, towards them.)

SOPHIA

I can speak better in my own defense. Besides, it is not me who will speak.

SUPREME JUDGE

Oh, is the ghost of Jesus going to whisper in your ear?

SOPHIA

The Holy Spirit will speak through me. That has been promised to me.

BARTHOLOMEW

Me too.

JUDGE 2

What are you, an echo? Shut up until you are directed to speak.

SUPREME JUDGE

These Christians are all alike. And you, a furniture merchant, does the Holy Spirit speak through you when you make a profit and when you buy imported tables and chairs for your penthouse?

ATTORNEY

(Standing) I protest! She is not on trial for her business or finances!

SUPREME JUDGE

You are right, woman; you do not need an attorney. Guard, proceed. (The guard walks around to the front of the table, faces the attorney, gestures to him to stand. He does, and is escorted off stage. The guard returns to his station.)

BARTHOLOMEW

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth . . .

JUDGE 3

Shut up! Woman, continue. You were speaking about history. What is your point?

SOPHIA

(Reading) “How do we know anything factual in history? How do we know there was a 9-11-2001 in America, over ninety years ago? There are three witnesses still alive, video footage, archeological scraps and debris, and many written accounts. But what about an event that happened centuries ago? Rather than a scientific method, we have to follow a forensic method, and decide upon the weight of proof, of evidence that either makes the event possible or impossible, probable or improbable. There is no 100% certainly but we can make a logical inquiry, gather facts and feasibility, and determine if it favors probability. You are learned men and women, Excellency, who have much knowledge and wisdom about judicial matters.” (There is a pause for about a minute as the judges’ glare at her. Then they whisper to themselves.)

JUDGE 2

I have never seen such an audacious Christian—most of them babble their beliefs and gaze towards the heavens, as they are convicted and led away. And a woman, no less!

SUPREME JUDGE

Continue. (Sophia grabs her notepad and begins flipping pages back.)

SOPHIA (reads)

“There are principles that historians use to give credibility that a recorded event occurred. First, if there are multiple and independent sources about the event, it supports probability. For example, Both Christian and five non-Christians write about the crucifixion. Secondly, there are numerous eyewitness accounts; the Gospels and Paul’s letters cite eyewitness references to Jesus’ resurrection appearances. Then there are embarrassing accounts that detract from credibility, such as Jesus could not work many miracles in Nazareth; he did not know where Lazarus was buried; and women, considered as property and inferior to men, spoke about the empty tomb—which would be written that men discovered the empty tomb, if it was fabricated. Fourthly, opponents verify that an event occurred, which supports historical

evidence, such as when both Jews and Romans record Jesus' passion and the spread of Christianity. Lastly, there is a close relationship between the event and the first written accounts, some of which occurred within five-ten years of Jesus' death, found in Acts, I Corinthians and others. In conclusion, remember that there are ten sources speaking about Caesar but there are over forty in the first 150 years of Jesus' resurrection that write about him."

JUDGE 3

Guard, impound that pad. (The guard snatches it from her, tears up all of the pages and throws them towards her, then walks to his station behind her.)

JUDGE 3 (looks at the judges) She won't need any written material if the (mockingly) Holy Spirit speaks through her. (Everyone laughs. A judge lights a cigarette. The other guard does also.)

What do you say, Madam Scientist?

SCIENTIST (Avoids eye contact, appears to ponder the question, gazes blankly at the audience, and begins involuntarily twitching her face and grimacing)

SUPREME JUDGE (Standing) Well? Have you lost your hearing? (The guard steps from behind Sophia's table and takes a few steps toward the scientist, then stops, and fingers the trigger.)

SCIENTIST

Well Excellency, her arguments are sound and consistent with historical plausibility. (Pause . . . they glare at her. She wipes her head with a handkerchief. Judge sits.)

JUDGE 3

So, what about this resurrection myth?

JUDGE 2

Let's arrange for a boat to carry her two miles offshore, drop her in, and let her walk on water to shore! (Laughter)

GUARD

Maybe her Jesus will walk and tow her. (Laughter)

SUPREME JUDGE

(Shouting) Cease! Christian woman, plead your case for the (taunting) resurrection of the Jesus ghost that even your gospel, John I recall, claimed that he walked through a locked door. You see, I too have read your farcical scriptures.

SOPHIA

First, there are five pagan accounts stating that he was crucified, including Josephus the Jewish historian and Tacitus, a Roman. Nobody disputes this. Why would pagans, as they were called back then, agree that Jesus was crucified if they had contrary evidence? Or those Jews familiar with him?



JUDGE 3

What does Dr. Dofflemoyer say?

SCIENTIST

The outlaw's point is reasonable (clearing her throat.)

SOPHIA

Secondly, there is the fact of the empty tomb. Christian writers all agreed that Jesus' tomb was empty.

SCIENTIST

What would you expect from Christian writers? Probably the disciples stole the body and hid it away.

BARTHOLOMEW

Why would his disciples, mostly Jews, touch a corpse, defile themselves and be unclean? What would be their motive, to move away a rock—which was guarded by the way—and steal a bloody carcass? Would a religion be founded on such a lie?

SCIENTIST

So, Jesus wasn't actually dead. He revived in the tomb, left it later, and met with his disciples who believed he rose from the dead. It is all a hoax.

BARTHOLOMEW

You would have this esteemed court believe that a dehydrated man, scourged until the flesh on his back hung in shreds and his spine was exposed, in shock due to blood loss, got up and walked when spikes were driven through his ankles, pushed a boulder from the tomb with wrists that were impaled with spikes? Then he limped by armed guards for an unknown distance until he appeared to his disciples, naked since the Gospels say his burial wrappings were in the empty tomb, and they believed he was resurrected? Preposterous.

SCIENTIST

They went to the wrong tomb.

SOPHIA

Then anyone who wanted to expose the lie would simply go to the correct one.

JUDGE 3

Let's end this charade; she admitted her guilt.

SUPREME JUDGE

As the Supreme Judge, I rule that this inquiry will continue. Proceed.

SOPHIA

The third fact is that Jesus' disciples believed and claimed that he lived, was crucified, and in appearing to them on at least two occasions, showed he was resurrected.

SCIENTIST

They probably hallucinated.

BARTHOLOMEW

Individuals hallucinate; groups do not.

SCIENTIST

So they were delusional and saw a mirage or vision of some sort. Emotional contagion does that to people.

BARTHOLOMEW

But on different occasions in different places? Do visions, mirages, and ghosts eat fish and bread? Does a ghost tell a disbelieving companion to poke a finger in a spear slit on his side? Did the risen Elvis ever have a meal with anyone? I'll wager Elvis' tomb is not empty! (The guard rushes and rams his head with his rifle butt. Bartholomew slumps over the table, holding his head.)

SUPREME JUDGE

Lawbreaker, insult this court like that again and you will have your tongue cut out. Dr. Dofflemeyer, you may leave. (She exits.)

JUDGE 2

All of this nonsense about walking on water, calming a storm, feeding thousands, healing the blind, the lame, and raising dead people is trying the patience of this court. Moreover, how a religion started because of delusional disciples is still beyond my comprehension.

BARTHOLOMEW (holding his head)

Your Excellency, after Jesus' crucifixion, his scared disciples also boldly professed that Jesus was Lord. So did many others. You, who are obviously familiar with the Gospels, are surely knowledgeable that Paul the Pharisee persecuted Jews who believed Jesus rose and was the Son of God. He was present when a convert, Stephen was stoned and killed. Paul, an enemy of the Nazarene sect also experienced an appearance of Jesus that dramatically changed and convinced him Jesus rose, and he became a major influence in the spread of Christianity. Jesus' skeptical brother James, who thought Jesus was possessed, later believed he rose and appeared. James became head of the Jerusalem church, which today would be like being a head of a church in Mecca.

JUDGE 2

Hoax! Fraud! They lied.

SOPHIA

What would be their motive? All that they gained was excommunication from the Jewish religion that they loved, and were ostracized by their Jewish friends and neighbors. They never

profited with shekels, possessions, or reputation. The disciples were persecuted, some tortured, some crucified, and all but one murdered for their faith that Jesus was the Son of God who rose to meet them and left to await their resurrections. Simply put, they had nothing to gain and much to lose.

SUPREME JUDGE

Moslems also die for their faith.

SOPHIA

They obviously die for what they believe is true. So did the disciples and martyrs throughout the ages. However, people don't suffer and die for lies and hoaxes. All that the Romans had to do was torture the disciples, and if only one confessed it was a ruse, there would be no Christian religion. We can logically eliminate the fraud conjecture.

JUDGE 2

So they were not liars. They still are no different from Muslims.

BARTHOLOMEW

(Standing) Muslims die for what they believe is true. The early Christians died for what they witnessed was true. Mohammed had no witnesses for his so-called revelations. Jesus had hundreds who saw him appear in body from the dead. Lastly, terrorist Muslims martyr themselves while murdering others. Christians only martyred themselves. These are the differences.

JUDGE 3

Take that man away. He has made a grave mistake offending this court and His Excellency, the Supreme Judge and this tribunal.

(The guard with his gun barrel pokes it under Bartholomew's armpit, forces it upward and he rises, and they leave the stage. A gunshot is heard. Sophia gasps. The guard returns to his station. Then a judge motions to the guard by the scientist's table, who leaves the stage. He returns with a rat in a small portable wire cage somewhat the shape and larger than a human head. He places it on the scientist's table closest to the platform, and returns to his station. Concurrently someone enters the stage; she climbs the platform and hands a judge some papers and leaves. The judges review and discuss it.)

SUPREME JUDGE

Bring in the Rabbi. (A Rabbi, shackled and in prisoner's garb, is led and sits in the prosecutor's chair.)

JUDGE 3

You have listened to these proceedings. Tell this reputable court what you think about the Christian mythology.

RABBI

(Reads) “Jesus’ few references to calling himself a Son of God is not blasphemous; Jews collectively consider themselves ‘Sons of God.’ It is a figure of speech that Jesus, being a man, used as a Jew. Secondly, Jesus’ use of ‘Son of Man’ is simply in indirect, third-person reference to himself as a human being. Next, a contemporary of Jesus, Hanina ben Dosa, from Galilee, was also a healer and exorcised demonic spirits. He even prayed for a deathly sick son of a Rabbi, who lived, as recorded in bBerakhot 34b. Jesus was merely a Hasidic-styled Jew who lived as an itinerant preacher, teacher, and healer who obviously had God’s favor and power within him. He was like Hillel, a leading Jewish teacher who preceded him, and a contemporary, John the Baptist. Jesus was indeed incomparable as a charismatic figure. The early Christians made Jesus a deity, an idol and their anti-Semitism fueled the spread of the Christian religion.”

JUDGE 2

So a good man was deified like Krishna, Buddha, and a host of other religious personalities. An old story. Make a man a god. (Yawns).

SOPHIA

Yes, I too am disturbed that much blame was placed on Jews that a few powerful priests and aristocrats deserved. I dispute that Jews were guilty of deicide. Jesus was crucified because he caused a stink in the temple that Roman authorities would not tolerate. Probably a few priests colluded in his death, but Romans killed him.

RABBI

We agree on something, at least.

SOPHIA

But . . . Jesus’ reference as the “Son of Man’ points to Ezekiel 1 and Daniel 7:13-14, clearly indicating Jesus associated himself with God Almighty. Then his use of the ‘Son of God’ shows his identification with God. (She reaches into her cleavage, pulls out a slip of paper and reads) “In Mark 13:22 it is written ‘No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the father.’” (The guard snatches it and shreds it.) Jesus obliquely made these references; he was much more concerned with announcing the Kingdom of God was present, demonstrated this fact with his teachings and healings and later his resurrection appearances. No appearances, no Christianity. Lastly, he did at least thirty-five miracles defined as nature miracles, exorcisms, healings, and raised at least three from death as well as unnamed others. There is no recorded person in the history of the world that did as many healings as Jesus.

SUPREME JUDGE (Standing)

Enough! Take away the Jew. (The guard leads him off stage. The judges whisper among themselves. The guard returns.)

JUDGE 2

Woman, you live a wealthy life, do you not?

SOPHIA

Well . . . I guess so.

JUDGE 2

Don't assume that you are the only ones who have read a Bible; I find it amusing. In your scriptures it reads (reads from a Bible) "I repeat, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." How about this one—no doubt you remember it—the rich man and Lazarus? When the rich man died, Abraham said to him from a great gulf between them, "Now he has his consolation here and it is you who are in agony." Your Jesus often spoke against wealth and possessions. Hypocrite! What do you say to this?!

SOPHIA

I tithe 10% of my income and—

JUDGE 3

What about when Jesus tells the rich young man to sell all he owned and to follow him?

SOPHIA

That was directed to one specific man in one situation.

SUPREME JUDGE

We will help you accomplish this sacrifice, for as of now, I decree the state to impound everything you own and all of your assets. Such is the penalty for Christians in our country. Guard, bring the cage to the table. (The guard grabs the caged rat, walks it across the stage, and places it on Sophia's table. Horrified, she pushes her chair backward, but the guard stops her and shoves her closer to it. She struggles and shivers.)

JUDGE 2

We know much about you. We know about how your father would tie you as a child, in a chair in a cellar at night, when he went out drinking. We know about certain types of rodents that would nibble at you bare feet and jump on you.

SOPHIA

(Screaming) Noooooooooooooooooo! You can't . . . you can't . . .

SUPREME JUDGE

Surely a well-educated woman like yourself read 1984 in secondary school, haven't you? (She squirms, eyes fixed on the cage, and the guard holds her. The other guard crosses the stage, grabs the cage and holds it up.)

JUDGE 3

Renounce that Jesus is Lord and admit Christianity is a hoax, and you can leave.

SOPHIA

No . . . please, anything but that . . .

JUDGE 3

Guard, put it on her head. (Sophia springs up as a guard locks her in his embrace. The other guard raises it above her head.)

SOPHIA

(Screaming) You're right! You're right. Jesus isn't any Lord and Christians believe in a hoax. Take the damned thing away. TAKE IT AWAY!!!

SUPREME JUDGE gestures, and the guard exits the stage with the caged rat. Sophia covers her head in her hands and weeps.)

SUPREME JUDGE (smirking) It seems Christians find it easier to face death than their deepest fears.

JUDGE 3

They don't fear death; they fear life. (Laughter)

SOPHIA

Lord, forgive me.

SUPREME JUDGE

Take her away and let her spend the rest of her days in the hole. (As she is led offstage, judge 2 Stands.)

JUDGE 2 No! This is a capital offence against our great state! The law requires execution by either hanging or drowning.

SUPREME JUDGE

You dare to question The Supreme Judge? I'll have your head like John the Baptist's.

JUDGE 2

Excellency, you have done this before; you cannot be above our written laws about capital punishment.

SUPREME JUDGE (Rising, strikes him, rips off his mask.)

Guard, arrest this man now! (The guard comes to the platform, grabs his cloak by the neck, and leads him off stage.)

JUDGE 3 (Standing)

He is my cousin! You cannot do this.

SUPREME JUDGE

Infidel, leave this courtroom now! I will see you in my chambers! (He steps down from the bench, and exits.)

GUARD

Shall I dispose of him?

SUPREME JUDGE

No. Leave until I call for you.

(He exits. The judge climbs down, walks to center stage, and faces the audience. He removes his mask.)

I will not let this country be infected with religious fanatics. I am bound to this duty to God and my country. Who am I? (Sings a Rolling Stone's song verse) Please allow me to introduce myself; I'm a man of wealth and taste...I don't think so. Who am I, The Supreme Judge? It doesn't matter about who I am. (Handel's Worthy is the Lamb from MESSIAH plays softly in the background, crescendos as he does his monologue and the volume peaks as he finishes.) I have a wife, 3 children, and a modest home in the suburbs. I have enough to live on. I save for their college. I have no television and my wife home schools the kids. Is it not perfectly obvious that men cannot humanely govern themselves? Give men freedom and power and wealth and position, and inevitably they become corrupt. And you, humanity? You human beings? O you, your piety, your comforts, your complacency. You have your families and places of worship and rooms full of screens and amplifiers to tranquilize away your lives. And you would judge me? Take the beam from your eye and you will see clearly the splinter in mine. Who am I? Search your hearts—where else am I? Enough.

(He walks to the platform and climbs to his seat, puts on his mask, and sits.)

SUPREME JUDGE

Guards! (Both guards enter from opposite sides of the stage.) Bring them all back—everyone, ex-judges too, and have all stand before me. Move! (The entire cast is shoved and pushed by gun barrels from 6 guards. As they herd in the middle, a guard sets down a briefcase in their midst and slinks off stage.)

SUPREME JUDGE

The Supreme Judge is going to pass judgment on all you. Judges, remove those masks. (Pause) You are all guilty and condemned to die.

SOPHIA

Jesus, remember me when you enter your kingdom. (A guard rams her with a gun butt, and she collapses on the floor.)

SUPREME JUDGE (Stands and points his finger) Guards, I order you to (Loud explosion. The actors fall backwards away from the detonated briefcase. Tables and chairs fly outward. The Supreme Judge is blown off the platform. All lights go out. Pause. Sirens are heard and crescendo. Figures enter with flashlights and survey the wreckage. Medics perform their duties. Stretchers are brought in.)

MAN

The bastards did it again.

MAN

Who did it this time?

WOMAN

Who the hell knows? Muslim terrorists? Communist fanatics? Anarchists? Some sociopathic madman?

MAN

Remember the footage when they set off the dirty bomb in Washington? It looked just like this damn mess.

MAN

We will hunt them down.

MAN

Look—it's the Supreme Judge! (Some hover over him, shining their flashlights) He's seriously dead.

VOICE

Anyone alive? (Pause. Flashlights scan around the area.)

MAN

This one is—looks like a woman—she's in cuffs; she must have been the one on trial.

(Flashlights converge on her body.)

Lucky her. She was found guilty; they all are who enter this courtroom. Get her out of here and remove the bodies. (One by one the flashlights exit the stage. One man remains, scans in all directions with his flashlight. Then he holds it under his chin, illuminating his face)

MAN

Guess I'm alone. (He looks around for a moment to be sure). Father, forgive us. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for joining us when we meet in my basement later tonight. (Exits the stage.

Darkness remains for a minute. Then the cast with flashlights enter the stage, face the audience, and shine into their faces in a moment of silence. Stage and house lights go on, and they bow.)

END

(Thanks to Christian martyrs then and now, and the Voice of the Martyrs.)