

Luther, the Reformation, and Some Jokes
A 12-Minute Mini-Play
by Hans Fiene



A few notes:

1. While anyone in the universe is free to put on a production of this play, it was written by a Lutheran for Lutherans. None of the content may be altered to make it Pan-Protestant friendly. The only change to the script I will permit is the name of the congregation towards the end of the skit. If you can't do the play as-is, write your own, you filthy Reformation Piggybacker!
2. This mini-play is written to be performed by one adult (the Narrator) and a number of literate children or entirely by literate children. For congregations with few children, I've written it in such a way that kids can play more than one part. The Chorus can include as many children as desired.
3. I've also written the play to be performed as a staged reading, presuming that the children (and the adult) won't have time to memorize their lines. For the children with individual lines, have them stand when delivering them.
4. If you want to do it as an actual play, memorized and all, great! In that case, treat the kids without individual lines as the Chorus. Leave the Chorus on stage throughout the production and have the various characters enter and exit when appropriate.
5. Martin Luther's lines include a few quotes from his writings. Therefore, for those doing a staged reading, the part of Luther ought to be played by a child who can read quite well.
6. As most of the figures involved in the Reformation were men, most of the characters in the play are men. I've deliberately written Tetzel to be played by a girl in order to joke about this. In order to make that joke work, Hans and Martin Luther ought to be played by boys. But the rest of the characters can be played by boys or girls.
7. As I say in the opening stage direction, Martin Luther should be sitting next to Hans Luther on one side and Katharina (Von Bora) Luther on the other. The seating arrangement for the rest of the children doesn't matter all that much. Use your best judgment. I am too lazy to put a seating chart together for you.
8. Costume the cast to your budget/desire/energy level.

~Rev. Hans Fiene
October 13, 2017

Cast:

(in order of appearance)

Narrator: Main speaker, giver of context, driver of the narrative.

Hans Luther: Martin Luther's grumpy father.

Martin Luther: Our hero.

The Chorus: A collection of children speaking in unison.

Kid 1

Johann Tetzel: Seller of indulgences.

Kid 2

Kid 3

Kid 4

Pope Leo X: Italian Pope who excommunicates Martin Luther.

Charles V: Holy Roman Emperor, mocker of himself.

Kid 5

Kid 6

Katharina (von Bora) Luther: Martin Luther's wife, who has no interest in a kissing scene.

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2017

ACT I

The NARRATOR is standing stage left. The rest of the cast is seated in chairs.

HANS LUTHER sits next to MARTIN LUTHER on one side. KATHARINA (VON BORA) LUTHER sits next to MARTIN LUTHER on the other side.

NARRATOR

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." So wrote St. Paul in Ephesians chapter 2. God gave us these words to comfort us. For those who were afraid that they weren't holy enough, for those who worried that their sins would prevent them from having eternal life, God put these words into the pen of Paul to tell us that we don't need to be afraid. We are not saved by our own works, by being good enough people. We are saved by God's gracious love for us, found in the cross of Christ. By dying for us, Christ made us worthy to inherit eternal life. And whoever believes in Him will be given that worthiness. So don't be afraid that you're not holy enough for God. Jesus is holy enough, and all who trust in Him are covered in His holiness.

This is what God has proclaimed from the very beginning. It's what the prophets and the apostles proclaimed in the Scriptures. It's what the Church confessed in the Creeds. But over time, sin begin to corrupt our understanding of how man is saved. People began to preach that the blood of Jesus was not enough to save us. They taught that our good works were necessary for salvation and that they helped cleanse us of our sins.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Likewise, some people also taught that, when they die, most Christians will need to spend time in a place called Purgatory where, by being punished for their sins, they will be made pure enough to enter heaven.

Furthermore, struggles over church authority had caused the Roman church to insist that you had to believe that God said the Pope was the head of all Christians if you wanted to be saved.

Where did these teachings come from?

Answering that question would take too long, but it's not hard to figure out how these false doctrines became so popular with popes and bishops. The Pope, they claimed, had authority over souls both on earth and in heaven and therefore had the power to release people from Purgatory. And so it became common for the church to sell indulgences, little slips of paper promising that the pope would cut down on your purgatory sentence. Selling salvation is, of course, completely contrary to every word of the Bible. But heaven knows it's a fantastic fundraising scheme.

So, kids, how would you describe the state of the Church when Luther came into the world?

CHORUS

BAD!

NARRATOR

Indeed, it was quite bad. Speaking of Luther, would you like to meet him?

HANS

Hi, my name is Hans Luther. And this is my son Martin. I've invested a lot of money in this kid. He just started law school. He's going to be a fancy lawyer and become filthy rich and buy me a nice retirement home in Orlando!

LUTHER

Actually, Dad, I quit law school. I'm becoming a monk.

HANS

(angry)

What? How could you do this to me, you pathetic, ungrateful child! You're an embarrassment to the family name! You've brought shame upon your house! I'll never speak to you again!!!!

HANS abruptly changes demeanor and hugs MARTIN LUTHER.

HANS

(sweetly)

OK, I'll call you Tuesday. Love you!

NARRATOR

Now, tell us, young Luther, why do you want to become a monk?

LUTHER

Well, you see, I was recently caught in a thunderstorm. It sounded like this:

THE CHORUS make storm noises.

LUTHER

I was very frightened. So I prayed to Saint Anne.

KID 1

You did what?

LUTHER

Take it easy, dude. I'm not a Lutheran yet. I told Saint Anne that, if she helped me survive, I would become a monk. So I joined Saint Augustine's monastery in Erfurt, Germany.

NARRATOR

During his time as a monk, Luther was greatly troubled over his sins. He worried that God didn't love him and that he wouldn't be

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NARRATOR (cont'd)

saved, so he began to study the Scriptures diligently. Eventually Luther became a professor of theology at Wittenberg University. He taught classes on the Psalms and the Book of Galatians. During this time, Luther began to rediscover what many in the church had not been teaching for a long time--what it means to be saved by grace through faith.

Around this time, the Pope was trying to raise money to restore Saint Peter's basilica in Rome. The local archbishop also needed to raise money to pay down his debts. So they brought in a man named Johann Tetzel to sell indulgences.

TETZEL stands up.

NARRATOR

Tetzel used to say this...Wait, why are you being played by a girl?

TETZEL

You didn't write enough parts for girls.

NARRATOR

Well, I didn't write the history, Little Miss Sassy Pants. Now, Tetzel used to say this:

TETZEL

As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs!

KID 2

What does that mean?

TEZTEL

It means that if you want to get your sweet little grandma out of purgatory, just buy one of these indulgences. And the pope will be so impressed with your good work that he'll use his magical pope powers to let your grandma into heaven!

KID 2

Hey, that sounds great! Sign me up!

KID 3

Yeah, me too!

KID 4

Me seven!

TETZEL

It's "me three," not "me seven." Why are you so bad at math?

KID 4

Because I can't afford school since I just paid you half a year's salary for that indulgence.

LUTHER

Hang on a second. I don't like how you're fleecing the common people out of their money, pal! In fact, I have several objections to this practice of selling indulgences.

TETZEL

How many objections?

LUTHER

95 of them to be precise.

TETZEL

Oh, come on. Are you gonna be annoying about this?

NARRATOR

Luther was annoying about this. He wrote up his 95 Theses, his critique of selling indulgences. And on October 31, 1517, he posted them on the church door in Wittenberg. And thanks to the recent invention of the printing press, these theses made their way throughout Europe. This made the Pope very angry, both because he didn't want the flow of money cut off and because he didn't like having his authority questioned. So he had his people write responses to Luther, saying

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NARRATOR (cont'd)

that he was a false teacher and a liar. How did Luther respond? To summarize many of his writings, like this:

LUTHER

The Pope can get as mad as he wants, but his word means nothing. It's the word of God that matters. And the word of God doesn't say that the pope has authority over all Christians in heaven and earth. And it doesn't say that good works are necessary for salvation. It says that we are saved through faith in Jesus alone. If the pope tells you otherwise, he's not speaking for God. He's speaking for the devil.

NARRATOR

The Pope didn't like this one bit, so in 1520, he wrote a super official pope letter called a papal bull that said something like this:

POPE LEO

Dear Luther, it makes me very sad that you're causing such confusion and pain with your writings. It would mean the world to me if you would take them back. Also, if you don't, I'll have you strangled with your own intestines. Love, Pope Leo. P.S. All your books are now banned and we're going to burn them like the heretical trash that they are.

NARRATOR

And, Dr. Luther, how did you respond to that letter?

LUTHER

I burned it like the heretical trash it was.

NARRATOR and LUTHER fist bump.

NARRATOR

Pope Leo responded the next year by excommunicating Luther. Now, back in those days, the secular government believed that heretics were a danger to society and that they had the responsibility of punishing

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NARRATOR (cont'd)

them. So in 1521, Holy Roman Emperor Charles the Fifth ordered Luther to appear at the Diet of Worms.

CHORUS

GROSS!

NARRATOR

I know, I know. That does sound gross. But diet means hearing and Worms, pronounced Vurms in German, was the name of the town. Anyway, at the Diet of Worms...

CHORUS

GROSS!

NARRATOR

Are you guys going to do that every time?

CHORUS

YES!

NARRATOR

Fine. So at the...hearing in...that one German city, Luther was shown a collection of his writings and was asked if he was going to recant. But despite facing certain death from some of the most powerful men in the world, Luther held firm, famously saying this:

LUTHER

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason, for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves, I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.

NARRATOR

And how did Emperor Charles the Fifth respond to Luther's statement? Like this.

CHARLES V

(mockingly)

Oooh, I'm Charles the Fifth. I could have stood up to the Pope and considered Luther's arguments and done my part to make the Roman Catholic Church reconsider its false teachings, but I'm only 21-years-old and don't know what I'm doing, so I'm going to declare that Luther is a bad guy.

NARRATOR

That may not be an exact quote. But Charles V did declare Luther an outlaw. He also said that no one in Germany was allowed to feed or shelter him, and that anyone who killed him would not be punished. Luther fled before this judgment was made. And on his way back, he was kidnapped. This was a good thing, as his kidnappers were sent by Frederick the Wise, elector of Saxony. Frederick was essentially the governor of a region that included Wittenberg and he wanted to protect Luther, so he had him taken to Wartburg Castle where Luther pretended to be a knight named George. But not everybody was convinced.

KID 5

I don't think that George guy is really a knight.

KID 6

Why not?

KID 5

Because he can't ride a horse.

KID 6

Good point.

KID 5

Also, I think he might actually be Martin Luther.

KID 6

Why do you say that?

KID 5

Because whenever he introduces himself, he always says, "Hello, I am George. I am definitely not Martin Luther."

NARRATOR

In Luther's day, most people didn't have access to a Bible, let alone a Bible in their own language. So while at the Wartburg, Luther translated the Bible into German, giving people an opportunity to see that what he had been teaching about the Word of God was true.

Eventually Luther returned to Wittenberg where he and his fellow churchmen continued getting rid of some problems and abuses of the Roman Catholic church. They began worshiping in German instead of Latin, so that people could understand the services. Luther wrote the Small Catechism so that people could easily learn what they needed to know in order to be Christians and receive the Lord's Supper. The Lutherans also got rid of the Roman Catholic practice of forbidding clergy from getting married. Luther himself got married. Let's take a look at the wedding.

LUTHER

Oh, Katherina von Bora, I love you so much.

LUTHER makes a kissy face.

KATHERINA

(to Narrator)

I was promised there would not be a kissing scene.

NARRATOR

Throughout the next few years, the Lutheran Church began to grow and rumors began to spread about what they taught. Charles the Fifth was too busy dealing with military

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NARRATOR (cont'd)

conflicts to wage war against the Lutherans at this point, so he invited them to a city called Augsburg to explain what they believed and several of the Lutherans did exactly that on June 25, 1530 with a document called the Augsburg Confession, a collection of 28 articles or statements of faith clarifying what they believed, taught, and practiced. Charles the Fifth still wasn't convinced to let the Lutherans be because, well, tell us why Charles.

CHARLES V

(mockingly)

Because I'm Charles the Fifth.

NARRATOR

Exactly. But a number of Lutheran territories banded together in a group called the Schmalkaldic League and told the emperor that if he tried to attack one of them, they'd all go to war with him. So, safe and sound, at least for a while, the Lutherans continued preaching the Gospel and writing more documents in defense of the truth. One of those documents was called the Smalcald Articles, where Luther summed up the Christian faith with these words:

LUTHER

Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins and was raised again for our justification. He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and God has laid upon Him the iniquities of us all. All have sinned and are justified freely, without their own works or merits, by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, in His blood. This is necessary to believe. This cannot be otherwise acquired or grasped by any work, law, or merit. It is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us. Therefore, we must be certain and not doubt this doctrine. Otherwise, all is lost, and the pope, the devil, and all adversaries win the victory and the right

(MORE)

LUTHER (cont'd)

over us.

NARRATOR

The pope, the devil, and their adversaries, however, would not win. Even though the Schmalkaldic League would be defeated by Charles the fifth...

CHARLES V

Woo hoo!

NARRATOR

His victory came to late.

CHARLES V

Oh, come on!

NARRATOR

The Lutheran Church was already established. And even though Lutherans would also experience persecution at the hands of other Protestant groups, they couldn't stamp the Lutherans out either. Those who embraced the Lutheran confession of faith would pass it down to their children. They would send missionaries into foreign lands to preach the pure Word to others. When their governments grew hostile to their beliefs, they would move to new lands where they were free to faithfully worship their God and preach His Gospel. In fact, that's why we're here today at [River of Life Lutheran Church.] So even though Martin Luther died in 1546...

LUTHER

WHAT? What happened to me?

NARRATOR

Well, you did lead a pretty stressful life. You were also convinced that the four food groups were sausage, beer, more beer, and not exercising. So...Anyway, even though Luther died in 1546, the Gospel that Luther devoted his life to defending is still proclaimed throughout the world.

So the Catholics may treat us as heretical

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NARRATOR (cont'd)

Protestants. And the Protestants may treat us as insignificant semi-Catholics. But the best way to celebrate Reformation Day is to thank God that, in the end, the opinions of men don't matter. What matters is the Word of God. And the Word of God says blessed is everyone who trusts that He is saved not by works, but by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. It says blessed is everyone who trusts that baptism saves because, through faith, it gives us the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Bible says blessed is everyone who trusts that his sins are forgiven when he feasts on the true body and true blood of Jesus in the Lord's Supper. So today, we blessed Lutherans thank God for Martin Luther and his fellow faithful Reformers. But most of all, today, we thank God the Father for His Son Jesus Christ, who gives eternal life to all who believe on His name by the power of the Holy Spirit.

CHORUS

AMEN!