

THE CHRISTIANS

BY LUCAS HNATH



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

THE CHRISTIANS
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*This play is dedicated to
Pat C. Hoy, II,
Sarah Lunnie,
and Les Waters.*

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THE CHRISTIANS was presented at the Humana Festival of New American Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville, in Louisville, Kentucky, opening on March 8, 2014. It was directed by Les Waters; the set design was by Dane Laffrey; the costume design was by Connie Furr Soloman; and the musical director was Scott Anthony. The cast was as follows:

PASTOR Andrew Garman
WIFE Linda Powell
ASSOCIATE Larry Powell
ELDER Richard Henzel
CONGREGANT Emily Donahoe

Playwrights Horizons, Inc., produced the New York City premiere of THE CHRISTIANS in 2015.

WHO

Paul, a PASTOR,
and his WIFE, Elizabeth;
the ASSOCIATE pastor, Joshua,
a church ELDER named Jay,
and a CONGREGANT named Jenny or Jennifer or Jenn.

WHEN

The 21st century.

WHERE

America.

HOW

In church, a real big church.
And what we see is the stage, raised and carpeted;
in the center, a podium;
and further upstage, hanging, a cross;
surrounding, potted plants;
above, a screen for projections;
off to the side, two or three chairs in a row, chairs for the
 associate pastors;
and off to the other side, an electric church organ and organist.
Also, a full choir; the bigger the better, if possible.
And there are microphones and stands, enough for everyone
 in the play,
because everyone will *always* speak on mics, just the way
 pastors do,
or just the way congregants do when they testify.
The whole play is a kind of sermon.
Sometimes it's a literal sermon.
Sometimes it's made up of scenes that use the formal
 elements of a sermon.
Occasionally the Pastor narrates to the audience, which is
 slightly different from addressing his congregation.

A NOTE ON SONGS

During the play, the Choir will sing four songs. Below are suggestions for what those songs could be. Even if you do not use the suggested song, the song you use should have that general tone. Additionally, the songs you use should not in any explicit way conflict with Pastor Paul's theological stance. It is the responsibility of the producing theatre to obtain the rights to any songs that are not in the public domain.

Song #1 — Gospel, steady, comforting,
e.g., “God’s Unchanging Hand.”

Song #2 — Faster, rousing, revival music,
e.g., “Catch on Fire.”

Song #3 — A bit anthemic, deliberate,
e.g., “I Feel Like Going On.”

Song #4 — Bright, not-too-fast-and-not-too-slow,
e.g., “Farther Along.”

BILLING. *I am a pagan and proud of it. Believe me, before long, we will all be pagans.*

MORTEN. *And then will we be allowed to do anything we like?*

BILLING. *Well, you'll see.*

—Henrik Ibsen,
An Enemy of the People

*I feel an uncontrollable urge to communicate with you,
but I find the distance barrier insurmountable.*

—Pat C. Hoy, II

THE CHRISTIANS

The music plays.

The Choir sings Song #1.

As this song goes on, enter Pastor Paul and his Wife, Elizabeth.

And eventually, Pastor sits, reviews his notes, as the Choir sings Song #2.

Singing ends.

Pastor approaches the pulpit.

Takes a microphone in hand.

PASTOR.

Brothers and sisters ...
Let's pray.

(Some music continues under the prayer.)

Dear Lord,
bring us together today,
bring us together
in our hearts
and souls
and minds,

make us one,
make us a body,
because when we are one body,

we see something
we cannot see
by ourselves.

Make us whole.
Take away our fear.
Give us strength,

and give us courage.

Give us the kind of courage that helps us press on even though
we know death is standing there

watching

waiting,

give us the courage to know,
to feel,
to understand,
that if we pass through that death, we will find

life.

Ever
lasting.

In the name
and in the blood
of Jesus.
Amen.

(Pause.)

(Music ends.)

Today's sermon
has four titles.
If you're taking notes, I suggest you write them down.

They are:

(Titles appear on the screen above.)

Where Are We Today?

A Powerful Urge

The Fires of Hell

and

A Radical Change.

Part One:

Where are we today?

Well

We are

here.

Where is here?

“Here” is this
church,
this big,
enormous
building.

1000s of seats, classrooms for Sunday school,
a baptismal big as a swimming pool. In the lobby
there’s a coffee shop and a bookstore,
and out back, a parking lot so vast
you could get yourself lost in it
if you’re not careful.

Where are we?

We are here, today,
a day of celebration,
a day of freedom ...

... because twenty years ago this church was
nothing more than a storefront church,
10, 15 people.

Then for the next couple of years every Sunday,
20, 30 people

and then 50,

and then 100, and 100 that seemed big —

then 500.

We had to move ourselves into a bigger space, a local gymnasium.

But when 500 turned to three times that, then we started
holding three services every Sunday: one at nine, one at
ten-thirty, and one at noon,

and then we grew to twice that,

and then we just couldn't fit.

So,

we built this,

this sanctuary,

built it from the ground up.

And however much we thought it was going to cost,
it cost that and many times over.

And we were in
way over our heads.

That

was ten years ago,

ten years from today.

And you stayed,

and you paid,

and together we prayed

that someday we would finally free ourselves of debt.

And that someday
is today.
And today is the day
that debt is paid.

And ya know, today should be a happy day:
We have, it seems, reason to celebrate.
We have, it seems, reason to think that we are
free.

Sorta reminds me of the one about the man who turned one
hundred and two,
and at his birthday party,
his friend asked him, “do you think you’ll make it to one hundred
and three?”
and he said, “of course I will,
because statistically speaking,
there are very few people who die
between one hundred and two and one hundred and three.”

But we all know, *a lot* of people die before that.

And we all know, a lot of churches die
before they make it to where we are
but that doesn’t mean
we are as free as we think we are.
There is a different kind of debt
that we have not yet paid.

There is — there is a crack
in the foundation of this church,
and I’m not talking about the building.

I’m talking about something like Isaiah talks about,
Isaiah 30 verses 12 and 13,
“Because you have rejected this Word” —
“this Word” that’s God’s word he’s talking about —
“and relied on oppression

and depended on deceit,

THE CHRISTIANS

by Lucas Hnath

3M, 2W

Twenty years ago, Pastor Paul's church was nothing more than a modest storefront. Now he presides over a congregation of thousands, with classrooms for Sunday School, a coffee shop in the lobby, and a baptismal font as big as a swimming pool. Today should be a day of celebration. But Paul is about to preach a sermon that will shake the foundations of his church's belief. A big-little play about faith in America — and the trouble with changing your mind.

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—The National Catholic Reporter

“... plants the audience squarely in the thick of the battle ... utterly engrossing ... many attendees bowed their heads at each call for prayer before reminding themselves that this is, in fact, just a play.”

—BroadwayWorld.com

Also by Lucas Hnath

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