



drama by george

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The Steeple's Court

Synopsis: John Q. Public, age seventeen, is placed on trial for being a Christian. Because of John's shady lifestyle, the Persecutor (prosecutor) concludes that there is insufficient evidence to convict him. But in the end, John confesses to being "one of them"--much to the chagrin of his crooked attorney. Judge Sandra Mentle sentences him to persecution on earth, but rewards in heaven.

Themes: Taking a stand for Jesus in a hostile world, what it means to be a real Christian.

Characters: 4 male (John Q. Public, Joseph Black, Simon White, Howard Matthews), 3 female (Judge Sandra Mentle, Linda Adams, Jane Q. Public), 2 either sex (Announcer, Bailiff). The gender of the Judge and the two Attorneys can easily be changed.

Running Time: 15 minutes.

Staging Needs: There are tables for the defense and the "persecution" on either side of the stage, a large judge's bench up center, and a witness chair to the left of the judge. The witnesses are seated in the audience. A little theme music is a fun addition.

Acting Difficulty: Moderate.

Tone: Comedic dialogue.

Can It Stand Alone?: Yes.

Author's Comments: Here's my take on that old youth group standby, "Is there enough evidence to convict you of being a Christian?" It might just challenge your teens to a holier lifestyle while they laugh at some ridiculous characters. The original production was a big success at a lock-in.

Performance Tips: Be sure that Judge Sandra Mentle and the opposing attorneys (Black and White) have good stage presence--they carry the show. This piece is a lot of fun, but it requires good comedic timing, as well as some passable serious acting (by John) towards the end.

The Steeple's Court

By George Halitzka

(A courtroom. There are tables for the the prosecutor [we'll call him the "persecutor"], JOSEPH BLACK, and the defense attorney, SIMON WHITE--stage left and stage right, respectively. Up center is the judge's bench, with a witness chair to its left. As the house goes to black, we hear our theme music.)

ANNOUNCER

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to The Steeple's Court. Now entering the courtroom is today's defendant. He's been seen in the wrong places at the wrong times, and now inquiring minds want to know--"Is he or isn't he?" He may have to come out of the closet and admit he's a little "funny." John Q. Public, age seventeen, stands accused of being a Christian. Today, in The Steeple's Court, we'll find out if our defendant is really a born-ago weirdo, or just a heathen jerk who shows up at church once a month. And now, here is the chief justice of The Steeple's Court.

(The music fades out. Meanwhile, the BAILIFF has entered and stands near the Judge's bench.)

BAILIFF

All rise!

(EVERYONE stands.)

The Steeple's Court is now in session; Judge Sandra Mentle presiding.

SANDRA

(banging her gavel)

Siddown.

BAILIFF

Case number 565: The State vs. John Q. Public. The charge is being a Christian.

SANDRA

Mr. Public, how do you plead?

(JOHN and WHITE both drop to their knees.)

JOHN

On my knees!

SANDRA

(banging her gavel)

Fifty-dollar fine for making the judge wanna hurl!

WHITE

I object, your Honor!

SANDRA

And I object to your breath! Mr. Black, does the Persecutor have an opening statement?

BLACK

(standing and approaching the audience)

Your Honor--Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury--what is a *real* Christian? Is it enough to go to church on Easter and put a few bucks in the offering? No! The persecution intends to prove there's more to following Jesus than doing your good deed for the day. And John Q. Public fits the profile perfectly.

(He returns to his seat.)

SANDRA

Mr. White?

WHITE

(standing)

My client is the furthest thing from a Christian! He cuts class, talks back to his Mom, and once ran over the principal's cat! He's no more a Christian than you are.

(He sits.)

SANDRA

I'll try to act interested.

BLACK

The persecution calls Howard Johnson.

(HOWARD works his way out of the audience and up to the witness stand.)

BAILIFF

Raise your right hand.

(HOWARD raises his hand.)

Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you Australia?

HOWARD

(to HER HONOR)

Isn't that, "So help you God"?

SANDRA

Not in Kangaroo Court!

WHITE

I object! This trial is a joke!

SANDRA

So is your license to practice law.

WHITE

You promised not to tell--

HOWARD

Cross my heart and hope to lie.

BLACK

"Die."

HOWARD

Whatever.

BLACK

Howard, are you the defendant's best friend?

HOWARD

Sure.

BLACK

In the 5 years you've known him, has Mr. Public gone to church every Sunday?

HOWARD

I guess.

BLACK

And does he talk about it--even in school?

HOWARD

All the time!

BLACK

What a fine, upstanding young man! It's sad that we don't have more *Christians* like him in our schools.

WHITE

(heading up to the witness stand)

Mr. Johnson, *why* does my client attend church?

HOWARD

His brother gets stuck mowing the lawn if Johnny's not home Sunday. Pretty slick, huh?

WHITE

You said he talks about church a lot. How so?

HOWARD

"I can't believe I hafta go every week!"

WHITE

Has he ever said anything good about that place with the steeple?

HOWARD

Yeah. He goes, "Howie, I met this girl at church who's so gorgeous I asked her out--and so dumb she said yes!"

WHITE

No more questions, Your Honor.

HOWARD

Don't worry, Johnny. You're a huge jerk--how can they convict you?

(JOHNNY looks reassured.)

BLACK

The persecution calls Linda Adams.

LINDA

(blowing JOHNNY a kiss on her way to the stand)

Hi, Cuddle Bear!

BAILIFF

Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you Australia?

LINDA

Okay.

BLACK

Ms. Adams, are you the defendant's girlfriend?

LINDA

(reading from notes she has penned on her hand)
Yes, that is correct.

BLACK

(pretending he didn't notice LINDA staring at her crib notes)
How long have you been dating Mr. Public?

LINDA

(still reading)
John Pubic and I date one moth. Month.

(By this point, BLACK is sweating under HER HONOR's icy glare.)

SANDRA

Oh, Black? Do you think the witness could answer your questions *without* reading her hand?

BLACK

Doubt it.

(Another icy glare. BLACK takes LINDA's hands and places them in her lap.)

Linda, do you remember Mr. Public telling you that he's a Christian?

LINDA

Can I look at my hand for this one?

BLACK

Do you remember when you started dating?

LINDA
Not really.

BLACK
Do you remember what year it is?

LINDA
2005?

BLACK
Objection! The witness is an idiot!

SANDRA
She's your witness!

BLACK
Did John ever take you to church?

LINDA
I guess so.

BLACK
Did he seem to like it there?

LINDA
He always swears when he's having a good time. You should have heard him during the sermon!

BLACK
Has Mr. Public taken you to unsupervised parties--drinking and so on?

LINDA
Of course not!

BLACK
So that means he's obeying the *Bible* about drunkenness.

LINDA
No, that means I threaten to dump him a lot.

BLACK
(throwing up his hands)
Your witness, Mr. White.

WHITE
No thanks. You done good, Joe.

BLACK
(glaring at WHITE)
The persecution calls Jane Q. Public.

(JANE comes out of the audience and goes to the witness stand.)

JOHN
Mom! What are you doing here?

JANE
Hi, honey!

(She waves a subpoena.)

BAILIFF
Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you Australia?

JANE
I swear.

BLACK
Ms. Public, in your opinion, what is a Christian?

JANE
It's someone who follows Jesus.

BLACK
What does that mean?

JANE
Well . . . you tell Jesus you're sorry for the wrong things you've done. Believe He died on the cross and rose from the dead. You ask Him to be your Forgiver and Leader.

BLACK
Are you a Christian?

JANE
Of course! I was convicted many years ago . . . right in this courtroom!

BLACK
Why do you and your husband take the defendant to church?

JANE

All Christians should attend church!

BLACK

So Mr. Public is a Christian?

JANE

I'm going to have a long talk with John Quincy about the things I heard today, but I know Jesus lives in his heart!

BLACK

(smiling--for the first time in the trial)

Your Honor, there's an old saying that mother knows best. Your witness.

WHITE

(going up to JANE)

Ms. Public, I have a hard time believing your son has Jesus for his leader. Why are you sure that my client is a Christian?

JANE

His father and I are Believers! We've always provided a positive home.

WHITE

So, if your parents are Christians, that makes you one, too?

JANE

Of course not! It's a personal decision, but we raised him right--

WHITE

Sounds like flimsy evidence to me! Any other reasons you think John is a Christian?

JANE

He's a good person. Johnny isn't perfect, but he's never done anything *really* bad!

WHITE

I bet *Hitler's* mother thought he was a good person!

JANE

Mr. White! I wish you wouldn't defend my son; he should be proud to represent Jesus!

WHITE

But he isn't, Ms. Public, because he doesn't *belong* to Jesus!

JANE

Of course he does! When he was eight, he came home from Sunday School and--

WHITE

There's no way you can know for sure if John is a Christian, is there?

JANE

No, but he asked Jesus into his heart--

WHITE

In fact, he hasn't acted like one lately, has he?

JANE

I suppose not--

WHITE

According to the Bible, Ms. Public, it's by *actions* that you can see who's really a Christian. Are there any of those in your son's life?

JANE

But when he was eight--

SANDRA

Mrs. Public, answer the question.

JANE

(lowering her eyes)

No. I can't be sure if my Johnny's a real Christian.

WHITE

In fact, Ms. Public, when you were on trial many years ago, the Persecutor was only able to prove you guilty when you confessed--isn't that right?

JANE

I've always been glad I did, because--

WHITE

Thank you, Ms. Public. You may step down.

(JANE, eyes lowered, begins returning to her seat. As she passes the Defense table--)

JANE

Johnny, I pray you know Jesus.

(JOHN squirms in his seat uncomfortably.)

BLACK

Well, Your Honor . . . I'm embarrassed to say this . . . but the Persecution rests.

SANDRA

Mr. White--the defense?

WHITE

Why bother? Black did a great job with my case!

SANDRA

This is very unusual . . . would you like to move for a mistrial?

WHITE

Absolutely! This miscarriage of justice must stop!

JOHN

Wait! Your Honor, I'd like to say something.

(A stunned silence.)

SANDRA

But your case is dismissed--

JOHN

I want to tell you--

WHITE

Don't do it, Johnny . . .

BLACK

White, this isn't in the plan--

SANDRA

What plan?

WHITE

Plan? There is no plan, Your Honor. I don't know what Black's talking about.

BLACK

Simon, don't do it--

WHITE

Shut up, Joe!

JOHN

Mr. White, what's this about?

WHITE

I move for a mistrial! There's no evidence to convict my client--

JOHN

I want to take the stand!

BLACK

The Firm will not be pleased--

WHITE

Don't talk about the Firm--

SANDRA

You two work for the same firm?

WHITE

Of course not!

SANDRA

You better start talking!

(A pause.)

WHITE

Well, John just *happened* to come to my office, and I just *happen* to work for Lucifer, Screwtape, and Wormwood, Attorneys-at-Law, same as the persecutor--

JOHN

You told me your firm was Shadrach, Bushwhack, and Abednigo!

WHITE

No harm done, Johnny-Baby! You're getting off!

JOHN
I want to testify!

WHITE
No, you don't!

SANDRA
Order in the court! Did you losers have a scheme to wrong the defendant?

WHITE
"Scheme" is such an ugly word--

SANDRA
I want the truth!

BLACK
You can't handle the truth!

WHITE
Look, our boss, Mr. Lucifer--he doesn't want Christians to admit anything! It's better when they pretend they don't like Jesus.

SANDRA
So Black, you intentionally lost the case!

BLACK
I wouldn't put it *that* way--

SANDRA
What was your job in this scheme, White?

WHITE
To win.

SANDRA
And if you didn't?

BLACK
They don't call me the Persecutor for nothing! I'd make sure Mr. Public's life was miserable. *Everybody* would find out he's a Christian! Why anybody loves Jesus is beyond me, but Mr. Lucifer wants to make sure they regret it as much as possible!

JOHN
Can I take the stand now?

SANDRA

Come on, Mr. Public. I'll deal with you two later!

JOHN

Thank you.

(He goes to the witness stand. BLACK and WHITE begin arguing amongst themselves.)

SANDRA

Cram it, clowns!

JOHN

Your Honor . . . I am a Christian.

(A giant collective gasp from the BAILIFF, JUDGE, and LAWYERS.)

SANDRA

But I thought--

JOHN

I know there isn't any evidence to prove it--but there should be. I complain about church, but actually I think it's okay. A little boring sometimes, but I need it.

WHITE

I object, Your Honor! There's *nothing* more boring than church--

SANDRA

Except you, White. Sid down.

JOHN

And I'm sorry I treated God's name like a cuss word. Jesus died for me!

BLACK

He's apologizing!

WHITE

That's a bad sign!

JOHN

Linda, I shouldn't have tried to get you at Howard's parties. I know drinking's illegal when you're in school.

BLACK

But everybody's doin' it!

WHITE

And it's free the first time--

JOHN

I need to show everybody how Jesus can make a difference in my life. There should be evidence, but there's not. I even came to court to prove I don't know Jesus!

WHITE

Don't say it-don't say it-don't say it--

JOHN

I am a Christian. I'm proud that Jesus saved me from my sins, and with His help, I'll start living more like Him!

JANE

Way to go, Johnny!

JOHN

Thanks, Mom.

WHITE

Johnny, Johnny, Johnny . . . you blew it, kid!

BLACK

Time for the persecution to start!

SANDRA

The defendant will rise for sentencing.

(JOHN nervously stands at his table.)

John Q. Public, I find you *guilty* of being a Christian. I hereby sentence you to a lifetime of ridicule and even danger. This sentence will be carried out in direct proportion to how closely you follow Christ. However, I also sentence you to great rewards in heaven, because you are not ashamed of your Savior anymore!

(banging her gavel)

Court dismissed.

ANNOUNCER

What an astonishing end to our case here in The Steeple's Court! If you're just joining us, John Q. Public, age seventeen, has confessed to being a Christian! Let's see if we can get a word with Mr. Public before he serves his sentence . . . Mr. Public!

(JOHN is surrounded by JANE and LINDA.)

Why did you confess?

JOHN

Well, I realized Jesus made a huge sacrifice for me on the cross . . . and to deny Him so I can have more fun; it just isn't right!

ANNOUNCER

Ms. Adams, as the defendant's girlfriend, how do you feel about Judge Mentle's sentence?

LINDA

I think it's great! I can stop dumping Johnny twice a week!

ANNOUNCER

And Mrs. Public?

JANE

I'm so proud of my little boy! He stood up for what he believed in.

ANNOUNCER

Thank you, folks. Not the reaction we usually see from a convicted man's family, but this is not a usual case . . . Mr. Black, a word please?

BLACK

--And I would've gotten away with it, too, if it weren't for those meddling kids!

(WHITE pushes him out of the way.)

WHITE

The boss isn't gonna be happy about this one. And you do *not* want to make Mr. Lucifer mad! Good thing it's all Black's fault.

BLACK

Is not!

WHITE

Is too!

BLACK

Is not! Now that the defendant confessed, at least I'll have fun. I even have a volunteer to help!

(He indicates HOWARD.)

HOWARD

Johnny was always kinda funny, but I didn't know he was one of *them!* I'm not hanging out with any born-again weirdos!

(Theme music in.)

ANNOUNCER

Well, you heard it first on The Steeple's Court, folks! John Q. Public, age seventeen, is a *Christian!* It makes you wonder how many people out there deny Jesus every time they go through a trial! But in the long run, it's better to come out of the closet than pretend you don't know your Savior. This is [Name] speaking. For all of us here in The Steeple's Court--good night.

(Theme music up and out. Immediate blackout.)

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