

THIRD TIME'S THE CHARM

A short play about desperation

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SETTING

The halls of power of The Catholic Church.

CHARACTERS

PREFECT for the Dicastery for Communications at the Vatican, 67. A born pitch man. In non-clergy office attire. (*reference: Dr. [Paolo Ruffini](#)*)

DIRECTOR of the Secretariat for Communications at the Vatican, 60. Not buying it. Also in non-clergy office attire. (*reference: [Paolo Nusiner](#)*)

THE COUNCIL OF CARDINALS – Nine men, all in their 70s, in everyday Cardinal attire. (*This elite group, also known as C9, advises the Pope on Catholic Church reform.*)

CASTING NOTE

To stage with a 5-person cast, the following consolidations can be made:

- CARDINALS 1, 4 and 7 can be played by the same actor.
- CARDINALS 2, 5 and 8 can be played by the same actor.
- CARDINALS 3, 6 and 9 can be played by the same actor.

Cardinals can absolutely be played by women if there aren't enough men in the cast.

COSTUME NOTE

Ideally, the CARDINALS will wear some form of red with an approximation of matching hats – traditional broad-rim galeros, berets, baseball caps – whatever you've got. ☺

SOUND & IMAGE NOTE

Have attached two videos of the song/arm movements being performed. One is a bit risqué and the second is performed by the Teletubbies. ☺ Have also attached images for the other flip-chart pages – each can be printed as full-size or the suggested images can be hand-drawn on the flip chart pages. Have fun with it! ☺

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LIGHTS UP on the PREFECT and DIRECTOR huddled urgently in a downstage corner. Behind them is a table with the nine members of the Council of Cardinals seated at it (in numbered order so that 4 and 5 are in the middle). They are murmuring quietly among themselves. At one end of the table is an easel holding a large, new pad of flipchart paper. The top page is blank.

DIRECTOR

Prefect, you can't do this.

PREFECT

What other options do we have?

DIRECTOR

Isn't this sacrilege?

PREFECT

No. It's... reframing.

DIRECTOR

Sir, it's a pagan---

PREFECT

Have I said anything that isn't true?

DIRECTOR

No.

PREFECT

Is it consistent with Catholic Doctrine?

DIRECTOR

... Well, yes.

PREFECT

Then it's settled. Let's go.

*The two men move to the end of the table with the flipchart.
The Cardinals direct their attention to them.*

PREFECT

Your Eminences... thank you for your patience. First, our Director of the Secretariat for Communications will share some disturbing trends about Easter fundraising and attendance -- our leading indicators of future revenue health. And then I will share our recommendation. (*to Director*) You're on.

DIRECTOR takes a step forward. PREFECT removes the front page of the flipchart pad to reveal two line charts – both arrows descend sharply. (Sample charts available.)

DIRECTOR

Your Eminences. Easter revenue from all sources is down 48% worldwide. We were especially hard hit in the United States, where fundraising is down 64% year-to-date. In addition, attendance at Easter services was down an average of 57% worldwide, with the U.S. down a startling 72%. And with parishioners aged 30 or less, we are down 81%.

The CARDINALS flutter worriedly to each other.

DIRECTOR

There were no significant new revelations of misconduct by Church officials in the U.S. this year. And other American institutions have seen a return to pre-Covid levels for in-person gatherings. So we're not wholly certain about the reason for these steep declines. We'll continue to look into the causes and report back as soon as we have more insight.

The CARDINALS chirp frantically to each other.

PREFECT

Thank you, Paolo. ...Your Eminences, allow me to summarize. Revenues are plummeting. And we have to find a better way to market to young adults. We're just not relevant anymore. We need to reframe our entire proposition.

CARDINAL 1

What do you recommend?

PREFECT looks at DIRECTOR – who's shaking his head 'no' intently – and ignores him.

PREFECT

Well, your Eminence, there are some aspects to our Doctrine that we have been... *reluctant* to promote to date. And with the changing sensibilities of this next generation -- particularly in the United States -- we think there's an opportunity to be a bit more aggressive with our marketing than we have been in the past.

CARDINAL 2

Excellent. What are they?

PREFECT

The first is the number 13.

(he flips to next page – a representation of DaVinci's Last Supper painting – sample available)
At the last supper, we have a table for 13. We've never marketed this fact because, in general, the number 13 has been associated with bad luck and negative consequences.

CARDINAL 3

Yes, that's right.

PREFECT

(flips to next page – photo of young Taylor Swift with number 13 on hand – sample available)
But the American songwriter Taylor Swift has singlehandedly rehabilitated the number. Particularly with America's young people. And generally with everyone under 40. We propose hiring her to create a hit song about The Last Supper. Making us “cool” again.

The DIRECTOR hangs his head.

CARDINAL 4

Would she agree?

CARDINAL 5

Who is Taylor Swift?

CARDINAL 6

How could we guarantee it would be a global hit?

PREFECT *(to CARDINAL 6)*

That's an excellent point, Eminence. It's true that a similar plan did not work for New York City when they hired her to write a hit about them...

Eight CARDINALS murmur and knowingly nod to each other.

*CARDINAL 5 (to CARDINAL 4)
Who is Taylor Swift?*

PREFECT

---but they did not have an organic connection to her global fan base. And we have the number 13.

CARDINAL 6

I don't know, Prefect. It seems... risky.

PREFECT

(shifting gears, a bit more sales-y)

Well. I thought someone might say that. So let's move on to our second asset—

(he flips to the next page – a photo of the deep fake of the Pope in the white puffy coat)
---the AI deep fake of The Holy Father in that white puffy coat. We propose a new deep fake with His Holiness doing the HOT TO GO dance on TikTok!

He pulls a smart phone from his pocket, taps the screen and HOT TO GO begins to play. The DIRECTOR is visibly pained. PREFECT sings and does the viral dance's arm movements. CARDINAL 4 joins in.

PREFECT and CARDINAL 4

♪♪ H-O-T-T-O-G-O. You can take me Hot To Go! ♪♪

The eight other CARDINALS cluck their loud disapproval. PREFECT walks to CARDINAL 4. They high-five and PREFECT returns to his end of the table.

CARDINAL 8

Prefect! That is blasphemy!

CARDINAL 7

No it isn't. His Holiness would actually like it.

CARDINAL 9

No. Absolutely not. We can't condone deep fakes. And we certainly can't have His Holiness singing *that* song. *(short beat)* What else ya got, kid?

PREFECT

Well... *(he hesitates)* There is one more possibility.

DIRECTOR

Prefect, no.

PREFECT

It's a high-risk, high-reward scenario---

DIRECTOR

I'm walking away, Paolo.

PREFECT

(in full pitch-man mode)

---But I think it's a sure thing, Your Eminences. Guaranteed to reconnect us with the youth of America in a way that will ensure our return to abject popularity. *And this is something we own exclusively!*

CARDINALS chirp excitedly. DIRECTOR exits, shaking his head.

This is the greatest example of its kind in history! (beat) I am happy to report, Your Eminences, that the Catholic Church owns the world's most famous...

He flips the page to a picture of Jesus emerging from The Garden Tomb.

... ZOMBIE!

BLACKOUT.