

# LUTHER, CALVIN, AND THE POPE MEET

A REFORMATION DAY SERVICE DRAMA  
PERFORMED DURING SERMON

ADAPTED FROM A DRAMA BY JAMES C. DEKKER



(BILL MORGAN, BRIAN SMITH, AND CHRIS RHODES)

**READER'S THEATRE: "SO CLOSE TO GOD; SO FAR FROM EACH OTHER."  
WHAT IT INTENDS: RECONCILIATION WITH GOD AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE.**

*Scripture:*

**Psalms 90:1-6, 13-17**

<sup>1</sup>Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. <sup>2</sup>Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

<sup>3</sup>You turn us back to dust, and say, "Turn back, you mortals." <sup>4</sup>For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night.

<sup>5</sup>You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; <sup>6</sup>in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.

<sup>13</sup>Turn, O LORD! How long? Have compassion on your servants! <sup>14</sup>Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

<sup>15</sup>Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us, and as many years as we have seen evil. <sup>16</sup>Let your work be manifest to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. <sup>17</sup>Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands — O prosper the work of our hands!

**Matthew 22:34-46**

<sup>34</sup>When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, <sup>35</sup>and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. <sup>36</sup>"Teacher, which commandment in the law

is the greatest?”<sup>37</sup> He said to him, ““You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’<sup>38</sup> This is the greatest and first commandment.<sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’<sup>40</sup> On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

<sup>41</sup>Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: <sup>42</sup>What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” <sup>43</sup>He said to them, “How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, <sup>44</sup>‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet”’?”

<sup>45</sup>If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?” <sup>46</sup>No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

### **This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!**



**Narrator:** Around 1540 in the history of the church there were three great Christian leaders: Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Pope Paul III. On earth they never met each other. In fact, the Lutherans, Calvinists, and Roman Catholics they represented often struggled violently against each other. (Presbyterians were aligned with the Calvinists. The Presbyterian Church began with the Scots confession in Scotland in 1560.)

But God rules time from eternity. Part of God’s plan to make all things new is to help us gain perspective on who we are as God’s children. In that light, we are to confess our sins to God and to each other and to forgive each other.

Imagine the place where God is all in all. The time: eternity. The place: the hereafter. Here Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Pope Paul III can worship God together and speak courteously and graciously to each other.

**Martin Luther:** Gentlemen, if we were still living on earth, do you know what day it would be?

**John Calvin:** Brother Martin, you still think rather highly of yourself. I know you’re thinking it’s what some call Reformation Day, and you invented it.

**ML:** Well, after the year 1517 that was a day to remember, Monsieur Calvin, if I must say so myself. It wasn’t the easiest thing in

the world to write ninety-five points about the Christian faith and open up a debate.

**Pope Paul III:** Martin, Martin - I’d still prefer to call you “Father Martin,” for you were a priest. But then I must remember that we did remove you from the church. I still regret it. Anyway, Martin, you certainly started a debate. Some have said you divided the church and started wars among Christians.

And while you’d like to call this “Reformation Day,” many remember it as All Hallows’ Eve, the day before All Saints Day. Too bad that has become only a night for candy and skeletons.

But how could anyone from our time forget those ninety-five theses you nailed on the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg? Now I can appreciate why you did that. But at the time I was furious!

**ML:** Father Paul, but I’ll call you Brother Paul now, there was so much for me and many others to be furious about. Much of the Roman Catholic Church was a corrupt mess. The practice of Christianity was not even close to what Jesus’ first followers practiced. Making people pay to get their loved ones out of purgatory and for other pardons? Indulgences for the rich only? God’s grace is free. The Pope can NOT require payment for it!

**JC:** Martin, right away you start to get steamed up! I remember hearing a lot about

your hot temper. That never really helped your cause, even though many of your ideas were sound.

**ML:** Thank you, Brother John. I'll try to watch myself. But Please, Brother Paul, I should think that by now you'd admit that by the sixteenth century the church had sunk to a low point. It had stolen faith away from God and was trying to run God's show.

**Paul:** Martin, I agree with John Calvin. You still exaggerate and seem almost to try to inflame people for the sake of debate, even now in eternity, in God's gleaming presence.

But you have a point, I'll admit. We never said that the Roman Catholic Church saved people. We always said that God saves and forgives through the work of salvation in Jesus Christ.

**ML:** I'm not exaggerating now, friends. You and the church always insisted that "no one could be saved outside the church." I'm just quoting one of your own church's documents. Along with many others, I tormented myself because of that teaching. We were never sure that we were saved. We always felt that we had to prove ourselves good enough so the church would say we were forgiven.

**JC:** Martin, I remember hearing about your torment. When you were a monk, you whipped yourself...

**ML:** until I was bleeding. For years I did that, trying to convince myself of my salvation.

**Paul:** And you insisted that it was the church's fault.

**ML:** Because the church stood between God and people. You kept people captive to the church and made them wallow in guilt so they could never come to know a personal relationship with God!

**JC:** Martin, you're starting to boil again. Be careful!

**ML:** I'm sorry; I'll try harder. Anyway, I never realized that God's pure mercy and unconditional love and grace saved us, not

until I studied the Bible. Then I worked through Paul's letters to the Romans and Galatians and saw a light I'd never seen before because the Catholic Church didn't trust regular people with the Bible in their own languages.

**Paul:** Martin, I've got to hand it to you there. You were as good as your word. You translated the whole Bible into contemporary German. But without the help of early printers, the Bible could never have found its way into the hands of priests and scholars, and later into the homes of the entire European society. The printing press made your protests famous!

**JC:** Martin's work also encouraged a revival in preaching. Preaching had nearly disappeared from worship, Brother Paul. Worship revolved around the Mass. In the Mass the church focused mainly on Jesus' crucifixion. Just as important, he conquered death in the resurrection. "Up from the grave, he arose," they've sung in churches for years. So my complaints about the Mass were that you virtually killed Jesus again and again every time Mass was celebrated. We considered that blasphemous.

**Paul:** Brother John, you too have a way of overheating.

**JC:** I suppose so. But I believe you get the point. In fact, your whole church these days on earth is getting that point. Your next successor, Pope John Paul II, said over and over, "There is more that unites us than divides us."

One thing that unites us now, and I'm glad you've come to see it Martin's way, is that preaching has strongly awakened in Catholic churches. What's more, Bible study is growing in many ways.

Pope Paul, you have to admit that you have turned somewhat more Protestant in recent years.

**JC:** We keep learning. Priests are preaching from Scriptures that were silent in the churches for centuries. Many Roman

Catholics are studying the Bible as never before and the newest Pope, Francis, teaches welcoming and loving all, and inspiring care for the earth.

**ML:** But we still don't completely agree. Does God save us because of the gracious self-giving in Christ? Or does God save us because somehow we draw ourselves closer to God?

You and your church are not completely clear on that, Brother Paul. You still emphasize doing good works to prove a person's worth. And you still claim that the church is the only gateway to a relationship with God.

**Paul:** But you Calvinists and Lutherans have always made salvation too easy. You confess only to God, not to each other. No visible authority keeps you together.

There is still one Roman Catholic Church with many branches. But there are more than twenty-thousand Protestant denominations, many of them independently squabbling with each other.

**JC:** Perhaps we have divided because we haven't listened to God or to each other. We let our pride get in the way. We always need forgiveness for our egos.

**ML:** But what does unite us, really? Doesn't Christ's love flow over all of us? Don't we all believe that it is God who creates us and saves us? God makes us right; we don't do that ourselves. We are utterly dependent on God's grace.

**JC:** And we have come to that because we have read the same Scriptures. We come to that agreement only when we trust in God's Spirit to guide our hearts, our study, our worship and our prayers.

**JC:** I have to admit that the people who call themselves Reformed today have more to learn about God's spirit. We have to trust God's Spirit more. We have to celebrate together more! God is good, all the time!

**Narrator:** And that is why we are here today. We are part of God's eternity, united by God's grace with many whom we have debated in the past. We are here in this time and place to mourn divisions, but also to celebrate the Holy Spirit and God's love that unites us, whether we were once Lutheran, Calvinist, Presbyterian, Catholic, or Baptist.

We are here because God calls us here through Scripture and preaching to hear God's Word. We are here to remember Christ's death and his resurrection, believing that Christ's love gives us all new life and a sure and certain hope for the future.

Let us celebrate the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation and the gift of the Holy Spirit still trying to bond us all together as one big family of God!

**Benediction:**

**And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen**



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