

THE CALLING: A SHORT COMEDY

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SYNOPSIS:

LEE tries to “opt out” of Catholicism but is trapped inside the ultimate phone hell.

***CAST:**

**All roles can be played by actors of any race, age, ethnicity, gender identity or ability. Isn't that nice? In addition, this could be done by only two performers, with one performer playing LEE and the other all the others. Fun, huh?*

- FIRST VOICE: A typical “phone tree option” voice
- LEE: Person making the call
- CSR (CUSTOMER SERVICE REP): an accent incongruous with the name “Joe” would be funny but not essential
- CSR 2: a different but equally odd voice

SETTING:

Anywhere people are likely to be on the phone. Obviously, this can work as a pure audio play.

In the darkness the sound of a phone call being made. When the phone call is “answered” we hear the typical voice of a phone “tree” of automated option:

FIRST VOICE

Thank you for calling the Vatican helpline. To continue in English, press 1. *Para Espanol, oprima el dos.* For Latin, press “I-I-I.”

The sound of “1” being pressed.

Thank you. Please listen to the following options as our menu choices change regularly, in order to confuse Satan. If you would like to confess your sins, press 1. If you would like to convert to Catholicism, press 2. If you would like to join our happy family of nuns or priests, press 3. If you would like to schedule an audience with the Holy Father, please note that we are only offering group rates for citizens of countries considered to be in peril for their mortal soul. This includes all countries in the Middle East, Russia, China and, of course the United States. Ask for our special discount for Jews. All other calls, please hold for the next available operator.

Gregorian chant music.

Please continue to hold. May we suggest that this is a great time to tear off a rosary or finish that special novena? Someone will be with you shortly. By the grace of God, you are the next caller.

A bit more Gregorian chant. Then, the sound of ringing, followed by the voice of the Customer Service Rep (CSR).

CSR

Bless you for holding. My name is, um, (*pause*) Joe. May I have the date of your last confession please?

LEE

I don’t remember.

CSR

That’s perfectly okay. We can identify you another way. May I have the date of your baptism?

LEE

I...don’t know that either.

CSR

No problem. It’s my pleasure to serve you today. Can you finish this password: “Hallowed be thy...?”

LEE

Name?

CSR

Thank you. And now, how may I help you today?

LEE

I would like to revoke my membership in the church.

CSR

I see. I can help you with that today. First, may I ask why you want to revoke your membership?

LEE

Yes. I don't believe in God.

CSR

I see. I can help you with that today. We would certainly be sorry to see you go. I see from my records that you have been with us for a very long time. Since birth, in fact. Before I process your request, I would like to make you a special offer.

LEE

I don't think—

CSR

--We know that many of our subscribers find that they get too many emails from us. If we were to limit our emails to, say, one per week, would that be satisfactory?

LEE

No, I don't get emails from you.

CSR

I certainly understand, and it is my pleasure now to offer you a special deal that has just been approved. For one year, we will not require you to attend Mass and we will let a few venial sins, such as little white lies and losing your temper, slide during confession. May I offer you this special deal?

LEE

No, I don't think so.

CSR

I understand. (*Slight pause.*) And because you have been with us so long, I have now been authorized to offer you a special VIP status. With this VIP membership, you not only get the perks I already mentioned, but we will now offer membership in the exclusive Confessors Club. With this special package, we'll welcome you to the express line at any of our thousands of confessionals worldwide. Should there be a delay, you can wait in the specially designed St. Simeon chapel for VIPs where you can enjoy complementary candles, extra wide kneelers and an assortment of colorful mass cards that are yours to keep. As soon as one our confessionals frees up, a lay member of the church will personally escort you to your confessional, where you are guaranteed to have your sins heard and forgiven by no less than a monsignor. Our members

are surprised how often they even land a bishop. May I sign you up for this one-time welcome back package?

LEE

No, thank you. Please. I've thought this through, and I really just want to cancel my membership.

CSR

Certainly. And we do appreciate your years of devotion. (Pause) In recognition of that, before I complete the transaction, let me tell you about some other offers we have available to valued parishioners.

LEE

I really—

CSR

—First, if you agree to renew for only one year, we will give special privileges to another guest of your choice. These guests can include Protestants, Muslims, any letter from the LGBTQIA community (please specify and only one to a customer), divorced people or regular viewers of anything produced by Ryan Murphy. Except *Glee*.

LEE

But I really don't want to continue. I would just like you to accept my resignation and respect my wishes. I've thought a lot about it, and it was not an easy decision.

CSR

I see. Alright, then. I will process your request. Please note that it normally takes 40 days and 40 nights to complete the order. During that time you may continue to get emails from us, particularly during Lent and Advent.

LEE

That seems an awfully long time to process.

CSR

Our staff has been hit particularly hard due to the pandemic...and lawsuits...and well, a lot of stuff. We're working to complete the backlog as best we can. It's going to be tough, what with a hiring shortage, and with Pentecost just around the corner...We do ask for your patience. Or maybe, just maybe, you'll have an epiphany and change your mind. In which case, let me inform you of our special "Change of Heart" package should you choose to resubscribe.

LEE

Really, I—

CSR

Once you rejoin us, all venial sins will be considered absolved. In addition, while attending Mass is still totally optional, we encourage you to visit us in any attire you choose, including crop tops, sports bras, graphic tees, short shorts and flip flops. You don't have to shake anyone's

hand during the Sign of Peace unless you want to, and you can program your smart phone and ear buds to hear Mass said by your favorite celebrant, accompanied by your choice of over 500 musical interludes, everything from Leontyne Pryce singing *Ave Maria* to the original Kool and the Gang's *Celebration*.

LEE

I'll—keep it in mind.

CSR

Bless you. Now, before we finish the transaction, by canon law I am required to inform you of the risks your choice may incur.

LEE

Risks?

CSR

Of course, it goes without saying that you will be damned for all eternity, but you know that.

LEE

I no longer believe that.

CSR

Good for you. There are other possible, shall we say, side effects to bear in mind. These include, but are not limited to: boils, famine, frogs, blood, locusts, the killing of the first—er, do you have children?

LEE

No.

CSR

I'd keep it that way. Others have experienced possession, marriage to the Demonic Leader of the Underworld... and styes.

LEE

Styes?

CSR

Well, more like total blindness, but it's preceded by styes.

LEE

I'll take my chances. Please process my order.

CSR

Certainly. It has been my pleasure serving you today. Is there anything else I can help you with?

LEE

I don't think so.

CSR

Okay. Before you hang up, may I transfer you to a brief survey about your experience today?

LEE

No, I don't—

*Sound of call being transferred. Original
"phone tree" voice returns:*

FIRST VOICE

Thank you for taking time to complete this brief survey. First, was your request processed in a friendly manner? Please say "yes" or "no"

LEE

I guess so.

FIRST VOICE

I'm sorry. I didn't understand you. Please say "yes" or "no."

LEE

Yes.

FIRST VOICE

Next, were your questions answered to your satisfaction? Say "yes" or "no."

LEE

I didn't have any questions. I just wanted—

FIRST VOICE

I'm sorry. I didn't understand your answer. Please say "yes" or "no."

LEE

(Sigh) Yes.

FIRST VOICE

And, finally, would you be willing to tell a friend about the wonderful advantages of membership? Please answer "yes" or "no."

LEE

Uh, no!

FIRST VOICE

You answered no. Is that correct?

LEE

Yes.

FIRST VOICE

Please tell us why you are unwilling to tell a friend about the wonderful advantages of Catholicism. If your answer is “I don’t feel that I am qualified,” press 1. If you believe that “I can’t be bothered to get up on Sunday and spend one lousy hour thinking of someone other than myself,” press 2. If you are an earthly embodiment of an infernal hell-dog sent by the Lord of Evil, press 3.

LEE

Uh, none of the above.

FIRST VOICE

I’m sorry. I didn’t get your answer. Would you like me to repeat the options?

LEE

No.

FIRST VOICE

There can be no other valid option. Thank you for taking the time out of your selfish, sinful, debauched day to spit on a two-thousand-year-old institution. And have a nice day.

*The sound of the call being disconnected.
LEE takes a moment to process all this,
when the phone rings and LEE answers it,
distractedly.*

LEE

Hello?

A new voice is heard.

CSR 2

Hello, may I speak to Lee?

LEE

This is Lee.

CSR 2

Hello, Lee. My name is, um, *(pause)* Terry. Is now a good time to talk?

LEE

Not really.

CSR 2

Great! I’m here to offer you a one-time-only special to be received back into God’s gra—

LEE hangs up.

END OF PLAY