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Dramatic Publishing

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Virtual Devotion



*Comedy
by
Eric Coble*

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"Deliciously funny, poignant, beautiful.
The play's wit spins fireworks in all directions."
—Cleveland Plain Dealer

"Funny and thought provoking." —The Dallas Morning News

Virtual Devotion

Comedy. By Eric Coble. *Cast: 3m., 3w. (may be expanded to 6m., 6w.)* Armageddon will be brought to you by—the Home Shopping Network! *Virtual Devotion* is a day in the life of three members of a shattered family trying to navigate a world of pollution, terrorism and disease to make *some* connection through—and in spite of—their faith. Pete, a televangelist for “The Mature Warriors for Christ,” preaches violent hate against sinners, especially youth, to his 35 million viewers. He’s on top of the world until he discovers *he* has the Mystery Plague, a fatal illness he has praised as God’s vengeance. Anne, a sweet young telemarketer for the Happy Halo Ministry for Children, is desperately trying to raise funds to send CD-ROMs on the book of Job to children in Sudan. When her telephone number is mistakenly advertised as a national confession line, her life goes from harried to furious. Ruth is a sardonic woman who views the world from her armchair until she sees the face of Ezekiel the prophet in her tapioca pudding. Now the world is clamoring at her door as everyone from CNN to Disney is after her and her miracle. And Jesus, only Son of the Living God, has come back. He begins the day in a temp agency and finds himself in a string of service economy jobs, including working at Chubby Burger and delivering pizza. But why is He here? Why now? And will anyone notice? All four become deeply entwined in one another’s lives, eventually “meeting” on the Home Shopping Network selling religious artifacts just moments before what may just be the end of the world. *Area staging. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 45 minutes.*

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Virtual Devotion

Eric Coble

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VIRTUAL DEVOTION

A Play
by
ERIC COBLE



Dramatic Publishing

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(VIRTUAL DEVOTION)

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“*Virtual Devotion* premiered at Dobama Theatre on
January 16, 1998, Joyce Casey, Artistic Director.”

Virtual Devotion premiered at Dobama Theatre on January 16, 1998, (Joyce Casey, artistic director). Roger Truesdell was the director, with scene design by Ron Newell, lighting design by Chris Peer, sound design by Corby Grubb, costume design by Terri Jean Gelzer, props designed by Mary Walsh.

CAST

JESUS NICK KOESTERS
PETE BERNIE CANEPARI
RUTH CONSTANCE PFEIFFER
ANNE MARYJO MACE WOODBURN
LIL, and others SARAH JACKSON
ZACH, and others. MICHAEL ANDERSON

VIRTUAL DEVOTION

A Play in Two Acts

CHARACTERS:

RUTH. a woman who knows her recliner, 50s
JESUS. only son of the living God, 30s
PETE the #1 minister in his time slot, 50s
ANNE a telemarketer for God, 20s
ZACH. . . a fabulous reverend for the Happy Halo ministry
MARK. a non-plussed CNN videographer
LIL. a telephone confession operator
SETH. a disagreeable day manager at Chubbyburger
RACH. a CPA with a secret
PEG a perky reporter for *God in the News*
JOY . . . a grizzled veteran of the Home Shopping Network
LUKE . . a fresh-faced Home Shopping Network employee

Various Offstage Callers, TV Announcers, etc.

PLACE: A major U.S. city.

TIME: Next week.

PRODUCTION NOTES:

Virtual Devotion can be performed by six actors: Lil, Rach, Peg and Joy should be played by one actress; Zach, Mark, Seth and Luke by one actor. Everyone contributes V.O.s. All sets are minimal for maximum flow between scenes. The entire play feels austere, with fairly tight spots of light isolating the different playing areas. There is CONSTANT background noise of some kind except where silence is specified.

ACT I

SETTING: *A sparsely furnished stage, representing different areas of a major U.S. city.*

AT RISE: *The stage is dark.*

V.O. IN THE DARKNESS. Welcome to 1-800-GOD-CHAT. To better serve you, please note that this line is monitored by God at all times. For a simple confession, say “1,” for Righteous Indignation, say “2,” for Biblical Justification for your actions, say “3.” For Apocalyptic Prophecies and a complete weather forecast, say “4.”

(Dim light comes up on a huge recliner. In the chair sits RUTH, a woman in her early 50s in a jogging outfit, slippers, baseball cap, and telephone headset, silently staring at her TV—the pale light illuminating her face in the darkness. A host of snack foods are spread out around her. An unintelligible conversation burbles from her television.

Several moments pass as she watches, engrossed... then...

Lights come up on the rest of the stage—bare except for a small chair.

The cheerful voice of the INTERVIEWER crackles over an intercom.)

INTERVIEWER V.O. Next applicant, please. #607-B, please step forward. Mr. Jesus Christ, Only Son of the Living God?

(JESUS enters in the archetypal robe, long hair, beard, etc. He's the real deal.)

INTERVIEWER V.O. Have a seat, please. *(JESUS does.)*
Your, ah, your résumé seems a little spotty here, Jesus. The only work experience you listed is “spreading the word of our Father.”

JESUS. Yes.

INTERVIEWER V.O. I don't seem to have that down on my list of options. Was that sort of like telemarketing?

JESUS. Actually, you see, I'm here to—

INTERVIEWER V.O. So you were doing this...“spreading the word of our Father” Why did you quit? *(JESUS frowns.)* No problem. We can just check your references. You do have references, don't you?

JESUS. You know, there was once a hungry traveler who saw, in the distance, a figure approaching. And as he couldn't see the figure clearly, the traveler called out—

INTERVIEWER V.O. What's your typing speed?

JESUS. My typing speed?

INTERVIEWER V.O. And which of the following systems do you know: Wordjerker 9.6? Mindless Excel? Skillfree Labor 3.4?

JESUS. How does one teach a system, when one doesn't know the Truth?

INTERVIEWER V.O. ...Right. Would you call yourself a “people person”? (*JESUS starts to speak.*) ‘Cause I gotta tell you, you’re coming off as a “3” on the cooperation scale here. What’s your favorite color?

JESUS. What does that have to do with—

INTERVIEWER V.O. Will you just let me ask the questions? I ask the questions. You answer the questions. That’s how this works. Now if you were a tree, what kind of tree would you be?

JESUS. Look, we only have until midnight. I just need to reach those who have no voices—

INTERVIEWER V.O. Well, you’ve come to the right temp agency. Do you feel most comfortable working with one, two, or five colleagues?

(*Pause.*)

JESUS. How about twelve?

INTERVIEWER V.O. Now we’re getting somewhere. Can you give me a list of your outside activities, Jesus? (*JESUS starts to speak.*) But please don’t list any ethnic or religious activities. (*JESUS stares at the INTERVIEWER.*) You know. Activities. Watching TV. Copyright Piracy? Porn-Surfing? (*JESUS looks sad.*)

(*Lights shift to Pete’s home cathedral. Low hum of television cameras.*)

ANNOUNCER V.O. Good morning!! Put in your ears and eyes for the number-one ministry in America: The Mature Warriors for Christ! Bringing you and over 35 million like-minded senior citizens the Living Word,

with inspirational thoughts, music, gospel-oriented special effects, and live from his home cathedral—the Reverend Pete!

(REVEREND PETE steps forward, wearing a fantastically sharp suit, tie and telephone headset, grinning far too wide a smile and bobbing far too perfect a head of hair. His arms are outstretched to give the world a big, big hug. When he moves, he prowls like a caged animal.)

PETE. Amen! Welcome, warriors! To the ministry for the older, wiser Americans looking for the inside scoop on who'll be saved and who'll be sitting in the barbecue pit of damnation when the Rapture starts. And it is starting! Oh, I know, you say, "Pete, it's not even seven yet—do we have to talk about Armageddon right now? Let me get that first cup of coffee. Let me hook up my IV." Balderdash! The signs are falling faster than a sinner's pants in the red-light district of the Worldwide Web! You got your earthquakes. You got your wars. You got this Mystery Plague. The Rolling Stones are still alive—how many more signs do you need?? *(Holds up a disk.)* It's all right here in my new disk: "It's the End of Time and I Can't Find the Snooze Button." Now, I have heard you all crying, moaning, "Pete, it may be the End Times, but I don't know what to do when the anti-Christ comes ringing my buzzer!" Well, when this world of sin is wrapping up to wave the final bye-bye, you have one job and one job only!... You locate your enemies. Yes! Pry 'em out like the weeds they are. "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out." Well, if your neighbor's

eye causes you to sin, pluck that out first. I don't care if you do have a plank in your own eye. You can't do anything about that when your neighbor's over here jabbering on about the speck in his eye, can you? No sir! So yank that neighbor like a weed, then settle back in your recliner to remove the plank from your own eye. But... how do you identify the neighbors who need yanking? (*Holding up a disk.*) Right here. My six-part series: "The Big Book of Condemnation." Categorized, alphabetized, and stigmatized in one handy resource. Now we've already covered the murderers, blasphemers, homosexuals, record executives, Australians, and the man who invented the thong bikini. But today we're going right to the root of evil in our society. Youth. In Mark 10:14, Jesus says "Let the little children come to me." Well, right. Jesus was talking about cute little jelly-smearing kids there. But what about the teenagers? The twenty-somethings? Does Jesus say, "Let the pimply faced long-haired punks who listen to "Pimp Daddy Bigg" come to me? I think not. Think about it! When you were their age, you were able to walk around outside unafraid of violence and filthy air and this Mystery Plague that's oozing out of the very pores of America, weren't you? But now they're on the scene and you're terrified to go outside! Which, praise God, is actually a blessing! Because now you never have to make contact with these people! The less contact, the less Satan seduction rubs off on you. It is so much easier to recognize your enemies when you don't have to meet them! Halleluiah! Call 1-800-WE-SMITE. Or e-mail us your order at www.holycow.org. Do it for yourself. Do it for someone you love. Do it for God.

(RUTH, the woman in the recliner, staring at her television, now speaks to it.)

RUTH. I don't know, Pete.

PETE. Let us pray.

RUTH. Sure, let's do that. *(She closes her eyes.)*

PETE. Dear Lord.

RUTH. Dear Lord.

PETE. I'm so sorry.

RUTH. I'm so sorry.

PETE. So very, very sorry.

RUTH. So very, very sorry.

PETE. Oh boy, am I sorry.

RUTH. Oh boy, am I... *(Her telephone headset rings, but she keeps her eyes closed.)* Answer.

PETE. But I'm opening my heart.

RUTH. But I'm opening my heart— Hi, Deb. How ya doin'?

PETE. My heart doors are wide open!

RUTH. You don't say—wide open—

PETE. Come on in, Jesus!

RUTH. Come on in, Jesus—no, Deb, I'm listenin'...

PETE. Come on in, Jesus!

RUTH. No, Jesus isn't at the door, Deb, I'm—

PETE. Oh, hello, Jesus!

RUTH. I'm prayin' here, Deb. What do you want?

PETE. Sit down and put your feet up, Jesus!

RUTH. Feet up Jesus— What channel?

PETE. Oh, Jesus! Are we glad to see you! Have a cookie!
Amen!

RUTH. Cookie amen! *(Opens her eyes.)* Channel 402.

SEXY FEMALE TV V.O. Do you have a...secret?

RUTH. Me?

SEXY FEMALE TV V.O. Have you been a naughty boy or girl?

RUTH. Deb, this doesn't look like a cooking show to me.

SEXY FEMALE TV V.O. —or something you just need to get off your...chest?

RUTH. I don't even see a kitchen.

SEXY FEMALE TV V.O. Call the Confession Line.

1-900-FORGIVE. Totally confidential. Totally real. Tell me about it. You'll feel all better. 1-900-FORGIVE.

MALE TV V.O. \$4.99 a minute, for entertainment purposes only; kids, make sure your parents know you're confessing.

RUTH (*into phone*). Oh, 502! Not 402! Sorry. (*To TV.*) Channel 502.

TV CHEF V.O. —but for this recipe, you're going to need about five cans of carbonated cheese...

RUTH. You know I love my cheese, Deb. (*To TV.*) Channel 777.

PETE. —because the Second Coming is coming, coming, coming! It could happen tomorrow...

RUTH. Channel 502.

TV CHEF V.O. —and you won't want to mix it up with the sausage potpourri.

RUTH. I'm more of a microwave gal, Deb. Channel 777.

PETE. 'Cause when Jesus is in your eyes—

RUTH. Channel 502.

TV CHEF V.O. —you can almost smell the sizzle!

RUTH. I gotta get one of those split-screen TVs.

TV CHEF V.O. Then you stir in the chickenless eggs—

RUTH. You're makin' me hungry here, Deb. Channel 777.

(*She pulls a little container from her food cache.*)

PETE. —hungry for a miracle. We all are. I know I am.

RUTH. Naw, I'm just gonna catch some TV today. Mondays are big days for my church channels and the Home Shopping Network.

PETE. So keep your eye out for a miracle today—

RUTH (*opening her pudding and pulling out a spoon*). You know me—feet up, bag of chips, and the Lord, and I'm a happy woman.

PETE. Can you see it? Can you see the miracle out there?

RUTH (*staring at her pudding*). Oh. Dear. Lord.

PETE. Any miracle at all.

RUTH (*in an awed whisper*). Deb. The tapioca pudding. There's a face...Deb. There's the face of Ezekial the Prophet in my pudding.

PETE. Hallelujah!

(Lights shift to Anne's apartment. Low electronic sounds.

ANNE, a harried young woman in a hastily put-together outfit, sits on a small chair with her laptop and several sheets of computer paper. She gulps down a bite of donut and a swig of bottled water, speaking into her telephone headset while typing.)

ANNE. Um. Hi. Matt? This is Anne from the Happy Halo ministry, and...no. No, you don't know me. But, um, "I'm calling this morning to tell you about our mission to bring the word of God to children across the world. We feel that with a strong moral foundation, our children will be better equipped to face the growing challenges facing our society today—" I mean, that's our mission statement, I guess. But it's really about...I

mean, I don't know if you've ever seen those vids of the little kids when they feel like they really matter and fit in, but it's just...what? Oh. Well, I'm calling because we're about to do a mass mailing of CD-ROMs on the Book of Job to the children in Sudan, and—hello? Hello, Matt?... Hang Up. *(Takes another sip of water, hits a key on her laptop.)* “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations.” “Go therefore, and make disciples of all...” *(Her phone headset rings.)* Answer.

(REVEREND ZACH jogs on in a dazzlingly tailored workout suit and headset, checking his pager and pulse.)

ZACH. Blesséd morning, Grace.

ANNE. Oh! Reverend Zach! Hi! Blesséd morning. I didn't—wow. You're calling me.

ZACH. It's about the Lunchtime Bible Story, Grace—

ANNE. Um. Actually this is Anne.

ZACH. Anne? Do I know you?

ANNE. I'm in fund-raising.

ZACH. Oh, right, right, right. How's that going?

ANNE. Oh...pretty good. Could be better. You know...

ZACH. 'Cause we've got to get those disks to Sudan ASAP, Anne. Postage rates go up tomorrow.

ANNE. Oh, I know! And we'll get that money. God wants us to get that money.

ZACH. Yes, He does. I know you won't let our Father down. Listen, I've got twelve calls to return, Anne—

ANNE. You're so popular.

ZACH. —but since you're on the line anyway, you can save me one of them. Can you do the Lunch Time Bible Story today?

ANNE. Me?

ZACH. Somebody's got to broadcast the kids' sermon.
You up for it?

ANNE. I'd love to. I guess.

ZACH. Great. I'll zip you the bullet points and Fed-Ex you the props. Should be simple. Genesis. You remember Genesis, right, Anne?

ANNE. I believe so. Fall of humanity. Less gardening, more childbirth.

ZACH. Beg your pardon?

ANNE. Just a little...joke.

ZACH. Humor's good. Kids like humor. So if this comes off okay, I may have another mission for you this evening.

ANNE. Wow. This is all so sudden.

ZACH. When God knocks you've got to step up to the plate, Anne. You help God get those disks over the ocean today, and who knows what He'll ask you to do tomorrow.

ANNE. Oh, actually I hope He doesn't ask too much tomorrow. Tomorrow's my birthday. I was going to go get a fish. Just a little orange one. In a tank. With the little castle, you know, and...

ZACH. Fish. That's cute, Anne. Let's just see how our cash flow looks tonight, and we'll see what Happy Halo can do for your birthday.

ANNE. Oh. The church doesn't have to—

ZACH. We want to, Anne. It's the little worker-bees like you that keep the hive of Christianity buzzing. And we value that. Don't let us down. Hang Up. (*He exits.*)

ANNE. I...no, sir. Hang Up. "Little worker bees"? No judgment. No judgment. I'm going to be on TV! I've

got to change, I've got to...wait. Disks to Sudan. For the kids. (*Into phone.*) Dial Tone. 484-3797. For the kids. Hi! Is this John? This is Anne from the Happy Halo... no, you don't know me— (*Her headset buzzes.*) Can you hold on? Hold. Transfer. Speaker Phone. Hello?

(The voice of REA, a young woman, crackles over the intercom.)

REA V.O. Hi. Is this that Confession Line?

ANNE. What?

REA V.O. Confession Line. 1-900-FORGIVE.

ANNE. I'm sorry, I think—

REA V.O. 'Cause I've gotta tell somebody.

ANNE. But—

REA V.O. I mean, he knew I knew where the frying pan was and how to use it, I'd warned him, but—

ANNE. Actually—

REA V.O. When he insulted my muffins for, like, the 200th time—

ANNE. I'm not sure you should be telling me this.

REA V.O. What. I didn't call the Guilt Line again, did I? That's the last thing I—

ANNE. No, this is Happy Halo ministry for children. I'm Anne.

REA V.O. "Happy Halo"?

ANNE. Yeah.

REA V.O. Oh. Can you, like, connect me to an emergency room then?

ANNE. I don't really have the technology for that. Sorry.

REA V.O. Thanks for nothing. Hang Up.