



# Crossing the Divine

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## **CROSSING THE DIVINE**

A Senior Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Divinity, Harvard  
Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts

By

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## CHARACTERS

ALEX, SEMINARY STUDENT

GOD (GOD 1, GOD 2, GOD 3), 3 ACTORS (NOT NECESSARRILY IN THIS ORDER): 1 MALE, 1 FEMALE, 1 ANDROGENES OR GENDER NON-CONFORMING, PREFERABLY ALL DIFFERENT RACES (WHEN THE CHARACTER IS WRITTEN AS "GOD" ALL THREE SPEAK. WHEN ONLY ONE OR TWO SPEAK, THEY WILL BE IDENTIFIED ACCORDINGLY.) GOD 1 SHOULD BE ABLE TO HUM ON KEY.

ANGEL, AN ACTUAL ANGEL, ETHNICALLY DIFFERENT FROM THE THREE ACTORS PLAYING GOD IF POSSIBLE

## TIME

The present

## SETTING

The stage should be minimally set with pictures of different labyrinths around it as decoration.

## ADDITIONAL DIRECTIONS

If possible, Alex will mimic the actions of walking a labyrinth throughout the play. This will call for some creative blocking.

I have deliberately not specified which part of the God character (1, 2, or 3) is the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. The Triune God that is part of my Christian theology is meant to be only loosely represented so that the audience can see the three as different aspects of a God who is so much more than those three. And to allow audiences to form their own understanding of the Divine.

## Scene I-1: Set-up

(The actor who plays Alex walks onto the empty stage and addresses the audience directly)

ALEX

Hello everyone. I am playing Alex, but the playwright, Heather J. Wakefield, wanted me to make some things clear before we begin. First, the character of Alex is Heather. This play, her MDiv thesis, is her exploration of who God is and how we can connect to God. She does not claim to have any definitive answers, but she does have many questions and some theories about what some answers could be. The humor, the struggles, and the overthinking are all true expressions of her. Although she identifies as female, she chose the name Alex, a gender-neutral name, so that someone with any possible gender expression could play the role. The only character description given is "seminary student". She hoped this would give the director more freedom in casting. Gender identity can influence how one views the world, but it does not limit who asks the questions raised in this thesis.

Heather began working on her thesis in the summer of 2020, more than a year into the Covid pandemic. Top news stories regularly included Covid deaths and vaccine resistance, natural disasters and other effects of climate change, racism and its ugly incarnations, and great political divides, including the events of January 6, 2021. The deaths of multiple people close to Heather weighed heavily on her heart, the grieving process hindered by the inability to travel for funerals. The world seemed to be falling apart around her. At times, it almost seemed like too much to bear. She honestly never doubted God's existence, but she did doubt humanity. And she questioned how God could let so many innocent people suffer through so much pain and grief without stepping in on their behalf. She prayed that everyone on earth, including herself, could have their eyes opened know the truth about the nature of God and how we should treat each other and the earth as a whole.

Maintaining spiritual practices such as praying, attending church, and participating in Harvard Divinity School's Tuesday Morning Eucharist services helped her cope with everything. Reading the Bible, especially when such reading was for a course on the Bible, sometimes offered comfort and sometimes made her reevaluate how scripture can be used.

Misinterpretations and disagreements about interpretations of the Bible have done great harm. Some passages, especially some

of the Hebrew Bible, seem to paint God as a vengeful, unloving being, not the loving parent whose presence she has felt. During her life as a whole and her studies at Harvard in particular, she has developed friendships with people of other faiths and some who have no beliefs. They are wonderful people who contribute to the beauty of the world. Despite scriptural passage to the contrary, she cannot believe that non-Christians are doomed to Hell. Reconciling scriptural teaching with her lived experience has challenged her. This thesis is her attempt to make some sense of it all.

Heather invites you to explore these topics with her. Whether you are part of a faith community or not, whether or not you have regular spiritual practices, even whether or not you believe in God, she hopes watching this will encourage you to think about your own path in this world. Do you believe in something beyond yourself, some form of a Divine? This could be in the form of nature, music, or another manifestation. How do you see yourself in relation to the Divine? What can we learn from each other, especially those whose practices or beliefs differ from our own? If only God or the Angels would tell us...

(The actor playing Angel enters carrying a stool or small chair. They look around, deciding where to place it.)

ALEX

I think it will work here. Thanks for bringing it in.

ANGEL

My pleasure. Angels are supposed to be helpful, right?

ALEX

Ha ha. Right. It looks like you were cast well.

(The three actors playing God enter in the process of putting on white robes. God 1 carries another chair or stool to place near the first. God 2 carries a white scarf or shawl.)

GOD 1

(to the other 2 God actors) It looks like this our mark.

GOD 2

(handing the scarf or shawl to Angel) I think this is yours.

ANGEL

Yes, thank you. (draping it around his or her shoulders) This is so much easier than wings.

ALEX

Definitely. (to the audience) Fake wings can look silly and are impractical for movement on stage. If you believe angels must have wings, you will just have to imagine them. The scarf distinguishes Angel for our purposes.

GOD 3

Just like the white robes make us God.

ANGEL

(holding up the edge of the scarf) In that case, can I upgrade?

ALEX

No. You have your roles and you will stick to them.

GOD 2

Now, who's playing God?

ALEX

Funny. Now, is everything set?

ANGEL

I think so. (to God) Are you ready?

GOD

I'm ready.

GOD 3

Do you think we look sufficiently God-like?

ALEX

Who can say? Works for me.

GOD 1

Good. We would not want to offend the Almighty. (turning to the audience) Remember as you watch this, if we say or do anything you find offensive or that you do not believe God would say or do, we didn't write this. We are just playing a part.

GOD 2

I will try to channel Morgan Freeman.

GOD 3

I was thinking more Octavia Spencer.

ALEX

Good grief. (to the audience) Are they developing a God complex? Anyway, we should get this started before we run beyond the page limit for Heather's thesis. (turning to God) I think we are ready. Places. (God stands together toward stage right. Alex moves to stage left.) Blackout. (Blackout)

Scene I-2: Alex Seeks God

(Dim lights come up only on God on stage right.)

GOD

I am.

(The lights go down on God as they, also dimmed, come up on Alex. Alex starts at toward the back of center stage and walks a curving path closer to the front before stopping and speaking, remaining on stage left.)

ALEX

The great "I am." What does that mean? Sometimes I think I know... You were, are, and always will be. You are everywhere and every time and every dimension. You are in everything and everyone, even when we can't see you. And we want to see you. I want to see you. And I believe you want that too.

But, how do we see you when it seems like we are always stumbling around in the dark?

(The stage goes dark for a moment until God speaks.)

GOD

Let there be light.<sup>1</sup> (Full lights come up on the whole stage.)

ALEX

But, I know you are here. I can feel your presence... now.

Sometimes, I think I see you in the first blossoms of spring and towering trees...

GOD 1

Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:3; All Bible quotes are from NIV unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:11

ALEX

in the twinkling stars at night and the beauty of a sunrise...

GOD 2

Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.<sup>3</sup>

ALEX

in the majesty of a soaring bird, in the love and loyalty of a beloved pet, in the grace of a dolphin, or when squirrels take a break from gathering acorns to play in the fall leaves...

GOD 3

Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.<sup>4</sup> Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.<sup>5</sup>

ALEX

I have heard you in the innocent laughter of children and have seen you in their parent's smiles. I believe you live within us.

GOD

Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.<sup>6</sup>

ALEX

You made us in your image, yet we are all so different. Do we all reflect you? Who are you?

GOD 1

I am. We are... more than you can imagine, far more than most people say that I am. I want you to know me, my beloved child. I created you and you are indeed "fearfully and wonderfully made."<sup>7</sup> I love you.

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:14-15

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 1:20

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 1:24

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 1: 27

<sup>7</sup> References Psalm 139: 13-14



GOD 2

I love that you can see me in my creations, the animals, the trees, in other people. For I am there. Keep your faith. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."<sup>8</sup>

GOD 3

The door is open, but you hesitate to walk through. Although you look for me, you cannot fully see me. Not yet. One day... Until then, know that

GOD

I am here.

(Alex continues a curving path around toward center stage, closer to God, and farther forward while speaking.)

ALEX

Sometimes you seem so near, like I can almost touch you. You surround me. When I let you, you fill me. You are more real to me than you have ever been. And yet you are a mystery.

(As Alex speaks the next few lines, Angel enters and walks to Alex. Angel places their hand on Alex's shoulder to comfort.)

I know that I'm not alone, that you're with me, but sometimes that isn't enough. Sometimes I wish I could see you directly, to touch you. I've come to believe that you love me. I feel it. And I love you, but I don't know how to love you. How does one love an enigma? Please, tell me who you are. Can you speak to me? I long to hear your voice.

(God beckons to Angel, who crosses to God. God 1 looks into Angel's eyes. Then Angel returns to Alex. This time, Alex can see Angel.)

ANGEL

You have heard God's voice.

ALEX

I know you...

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 7:7

ANGEL

Yes. We've met before.

ALEX

You're not God.

ANGEL

No, but I come from Our Creator. And, I have come with a message. You have heard God's voice. You heard with your heart and your soul rather than your ears. You do not always trust it.

ALEX

I worry that I am misunderstanding. I'm afraid what I'm hearing comes from me, not God.

ANGEL

You do know God, at least enough to recognize when what your soul hears comes from Them.

ALEX

Sometimes, I think I do. But I doubt myself. What if I do the wrong thing? What if my misunderstanding leads to something bad? What if I am going the wrong way?

GOD 2

Listen with your spirit. Be still. Breathe. Open yourself to me. I walk with you.

ANGEL

All your worry is keeping you from getting closer to God. Release your fears and doubts to God. Then listen and continue your journey.

(Alex takes a deep breath then continues the circular path toward front center. Before reaching center, Alex turns upstage a step and reverses direction as if walking a labyrinth. Angel steps out of the way, closer to God and begins speaking as Alex walks.)

ANGEL

You are following your path, a path unique to you. You have chosen to walk it. Trust your steps. Trust divine guidance. Think of your journey as something like a labyrinth. It has twists and turns. Sometimes you feel like you are doubling back on where you have been. But, if you trust the path will lead you where you need to go, you will reach the center where God dwells. You are always making progress.

ALEX

(Stopping) So, God is in the center of a labyrinth? (Pause)

GOD

I am everywhere.

(God looks at Angel, who nods in return  
before continuing to speak to Alex.)

ANGEL

God is with you before you enter, before you take those first steps. God walks with you along the way. For you, They can feel more real when you are in a labyrinth. When you walk one, you are often seeking answers... seeking God. And, each time you reach the center, you get closer to the Divine.

ALEX

But then I turn around and go back the way I came. I leave.

ANGEL

And you carry with you more of a connection as you go into the world to continue your journey in this life.

ALEX

I do.

GOD

I am always with you.

ALEX

Then, life gets in the way. I sometimes fear I am straying too much, that I'm distancing myself instead of getting closer. I fear that I will never truly know God, not while I am on earth. I catch glimpses, but I never have the complete picture.

ANGEL

And you will not see and know all, not now. It is too much for your mortal mind to comprehend. (pause) Fear not. Keep walking. You are going toward what you seek.

GOD

I wait for you.

GOD 1

We will never leave you. We never leave any of our children, for we live within you. Paul was right in his letter to the Corinthian church.

GOD 2

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that

God's Spirit dwells in your midst?<sup>9</sup>

ANGEL

God lives within you.

GOD

I created in my image.

GOD 3

We breathed our Spirit into you so that you may have life.

ALEX

(Alex takes a deep breath.) I can almost hear God. I think I'm beginning to understand, but I want to know more. I still feel like I have barely begun.

(Alex walks a few more steps on the path.  
God 1 moves closer to Alex.)

GOD 1

You will never walk alone.

ANGEL

That is why I am here. To help you get closer.

ALEX

Thank you.

(God 1 returns to the other two.)

ANGEL

You're welcome. Now, where should we begin?

(As Alex keeps talking during the next speech, Angel tries to interject, but gives up and turns to God for help.)

ALEX

(During the next few lines, the pace increases and the tone becomes more frantic until the pause.) Where should we begin? That's a good question. Where should we begin? You're asking me? How would I know? If you've actually been with me my whole life, you know it can take me forever to decide where to begin something... (slight pause, then stream of consciousness) OK, I guess only God really understands forever, but you know what I mean. And, in this case, I know so little that I really don't

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:16

have a clue where to start. Maybe that's why I like labyrinths so much, because there really is no choice, I can just walk without thinking, or at least without thinking about where I am going, physically, not mentally, I often think about where I am going in life.

GOD

(Holding out their hands toward Alex.) STOP!

ALEX

(Stops talking and looks toward God before asking the Angel) Did God just tell me to shut up?

ANGEL

In a manner of speaking.

ALEX

Oh. OK.

ANGEL

You overthink things. (Seeing Alex's mouth open) And yes, I know you know that. (Alex closes her mouth.) Just stop for a moment and breathe.

GOD 2

(To God 1 and God 3) Why did we make this one's mind so active? Or at least her mouth?

GOD 3

That is how she thinks things through. By talking.

GOD 1

But she worries so about overthinking and talking too much. And when she worries, she thinks and talks more.

ALEX

(Seeing Angel listen to God's conversation) Is God talking about me?

ANGEL

Yes.

ALEX

What is God saying about me?

(God 2 walks over to Angel and whispers into Angel's ear.)

ANGEL

Really?

ALEX

What?

ANGEL

God is trying to decide which would be better for you, slowing your mind or brief periods of muteness.

ALEX

Are you serious?

ANGEL

Yes, but God was not.

ALEX

Huh. I didn't know God was a smart ass.

GOD 3

That would be Balaam's donkey.

ANGEL

(to God) She always was smarter than her master.

ALEX

Balaam's donkey?

ANGEL

Yes.

GOD 1

That is why we made her mind work so fast, so she could get our sense of humor.

(God 2 nods in agreement while crossing back to the other two.)

ALEX

I guess if God created everything, that includes humor.

ANGEL

True.

ALEX

And humor makes life so much more enjoyable. Thank you for humor God.

GOD

My pleasure.

ANGEL

Now, since we are already talking about overthinking, would you like to begin there?

ALEX

By overthinking? (Before Angel can reply) Oh, by working out if too much thinking can keep one from understanding God. Yes, that sounds like a good topic.

ANGEL

Good. So, you have been blessed with an active mind. Does all that thinking help you get closer to knowing God?

ALEX

I think so... pun not intended. When I read the theology of John Wesley, his approach to faith resonated with me. It is based on four parts: scripture, tradition, experience, and reason. While scripture is the foundation, I believe reason is what helps us makes sense of the other three and ties them all together. Reason requires thought, so thinking helps me understand scripture, which tells about God, and helps me grow in my faith.

ANGEL

Yes. We are not saying not to think at all, simply to find other ways to seek God. Sometimes you have to get most of the thinking out of the way before you can open up to experience God.<sup>10</sup> Have you ever had experiences in which you felt more connected to God, when you sensed you knew more about Them when you quieted your mind? Have you ever learned more when you thought less?

ALEX

(short pause, thinking) Yes, I have. When I'm immersed in an incredible piece of music<sup>11</sup> or see wondrous sights in nature, I feel like I am experiencing the divine. And, when I walk along the shore of the ocean or gaze at the stars on a clear night, away from city lights, I am at peace and my soul knows that God is with me. At those times, when my mind is at its quietist, I can experience more.

ANGEL

Yes, that is the idea. Now, close your eyes. Calm you mind and listen. Listen with your whole being. When you are ready, you may continue on your path.

(Alex takes a moment or two to center  
before opening her eyes and slowly  
starting to walk the labyrinth pattern

<sup>10</sup> See Zaleski (2006) pages 35-36 for the inspiration for conversation on thinking and overthinking and how to connect to God.

<sup>11</sup> Zaleski mentions listening to everything with our whole hearts, as one would listen to music, as a way to know God on page 95 and listening to God with our whole being on page 48.

again. God 1 begins to hum the tune to "Open My Eyes, That I May See."<sup>12</sup> If the other two actors playing God are capable, they can join in. Alex starts humming along, then begins singing as she walks.)

ALEX

"Open my eyes that I may see glimpses of truth thou hast for me; place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unclasp and set me free. Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my God, thy will to see. Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit Divine!" (Alex stops and smiles.) That came from God, didn't it?

ANGEL

Yes, it did. Music is one of the languages God uses to communicate with people.

ALEX

One that I am able to hear and use.

ANGEL

Yes. And, when you are not overwhelmed by them, you have the gift of words. Written and spoken language.

GOD 3

In the beginning was the Word,

GOD 2

and the Word was with God,

GOD 1

and the Word was God.<sup>13</sup>

ALEX

So, there are different languages, different ways of understanding, hearing, and speaking to God.

GOD 1

(singing) Open your ears that you may hear voices of truth We sendest clear...<sup>14</sup>

ANGEL

Yes. God wants everyone to hear and know Them, so God uses

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<sup>12</sup> "Open My Eyes, That I May See" number 454 the United Methodist Hymnal

<sup>13</sup> Lines from God 3, God 2, and God 1 form John 1:1.

<sup>14</sup> The beginning of verse 2 "Open My Eyes, That I May See" with the pronouns changed to fit God singing.



different languages to reach different people, just as people use different languages to express themselves.

ALEX

Languages including music, visual arts, and dance..

GOD 3

She is understanding.

ANGEL

Yes.

ALEX

And people of faith can use many different languages, just as God does.

ANGEL

Yes. Religion is a form of language.<sup>15</sup>

ALEX

It is?

ANGEL

Religion is how people express the inexpressible.<sup>16</sup> People cannot always find the right words for what their souls perceive, but religion is one tool, one language that uses symbols and actions along with words, to try to encompass their beliefs.

ALEX

(short pause to think) I think I know what you mean. Sometimes, the experiences I have had go beyond words. What I have learned from my religious explorations has helped me understand them better, although there is more to it, more to God, than fits even within the theology of my denomination.

GOD 2

But you are on the right path for you. And your religion is one of your languages.

ANGEL

God says to keep your religion as one of your languages.

ALEX

I plan to. My church helped me grow in my faith, and I do not

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<sup>15</sup> See Aslan (2017) page xiv in the introduction for more on religion as language.

<sup>16</sup> Continuation of Aslan page xiv.

want to lose that. I spent many years revisiting religious involvement. And now I am committing myself to life as a spiritual and religious leader. I still believe I am meant to be ordained.

ANGEL

Yes, that is your path.

ALEX

Thank you. It has been a difficult one at times. (pause) So why do religions have such different understandings of God? Why is my vision of God so different from that of others I know even from my own faith?

GOD

There are many paths to me.

GOD 1

We are beyond any one understanding. No person on earth can see enough to get a full picture.

GOD 3

People need to approach from different angles and then talk to each other to get a better understanding.

ANGEL

Think of the story of the three blind men with the elephant.

ALEX

So people are blind? I mean, we are like the blind men in the story.

ANGEL

In terms of seeing more of God, people are completely blind only if they choose to be. But for the purposes of this analogy, yes, humans are like the three blind men. They each think the elephant is different in nature because they each feel a different part.

ALEX

Because they each only felt a one small part of the elephant, they only get a limited picture.

ANGEL

Yes.

ALEX

But, if they explored more, they would learn more.

ANGEL

True. And if they talked to each other, they would learn more and get a clearer picture as well.

ALEX

The trick is, they have to listen to each other and to respect each other. If they cling to only their own limited knowledge, they will never know more than that initial encounter.

GOD 2

Yes, keep thinking that way.

ANGEL

You have the right idea.

ALEX

But beliefs and practices of different religions can clash with each other. Even people from the same tradition can see God differently. If we are all seeing different parts of God, where do we find a truth to settle on for our understanding?

GOD 1

One day you will understand, but not yet.

ANGEL

That is the paradox of having a faith that is true for you while still being open to learn from others.

ALEX

So, how do we balance holding onto our own beliefs while listening to others?

GOD 3

Respect and understanding of another do not preclude you from knowing your path and your truth.

ANGEL

Listen well to others and the teaching of your own tradition. Pray and contemplate. You will know what feels like truth. Your challenge is to live that truth. And to walk your path while letting others walk theirs.<sup>17</sup>

ALEX

That is the challenge.

(Alex walks farther on the labyrinth pattern. While she walks, Angel walks to God to talk.)

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<sup>17</sup> See Zaleski page 62.

GOD 1

We need her to recognize us within herself using her Christian framework.

GOD 2

Word became flesh and lived among humans.

GOD 1

Yes, then help her remember how We connect and dwell within. The spirit, a spark of the divine, dwells within humans.

GOD 3

To be human is to be divine because of that spark. Have her use her gift of words and she will figure it out.

ANGEL

Human versus inhuman. Godly versus ungodly.

GOD

Yes.

(Angel walks back to Alex, who stops to continue the conversation. Alex needs to be in a position that allows her to walk facing the audience next.)

ANGEL

God asks you to think within your own faith about how God has made Themselves known to people in word and flesh.

ALEX

Are you talking about the Word of God and Jesus?

ANGEL

Yes.

ALEX

John Chapter 1 verse 1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

ANGEL

That is the beginning, with the Word of God.

ALEX

Sometimes I get tired of words.

GOD 2

Says the playwright, poet, and perpetual student.

ANGEL

And later in the Gospel of John, the Word became man.

ALEX

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."<sup>18</sup>

ANGEL

God walked among you in the form of Jesus Christ.

ALEX

So, one reason Jesus incarnated was for people to get to know God. By living as a human, God could experience humanity and humanity could experience God in a physical form.

ANGEL

Yes. Jesus, as human, could relate to people on a more direct and personal level. As a human teacher, God could speak directly to people to share the wisdom and knowledge that Jesus, as God, possessed.

ALEX

We were created in God's image and Jesus took on human form and image so that we could know God.

GOD 2

Remind her of the spirit.

ANGEL

And Jesus brought the Holy Spirit to live among you.

ALEX

So that we would continue to feel God's presence working in our lives. I have felt the Holy Spirit in my life, comforting me, strengthening me, and guiding me.

GOD 3

Yes, you have known that part of us.

ANGEL

And you also have spirit in you. The spark of life that dwells among and within God's creations.

ALEX

If we all have spirit in us, why do some people radiate goodness, and some are capable of horrible atrocities?

GOD 1

Some reject our gifts.

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<sup>18</sup> The beginning of John 1:14.

ANGEL

Humans are the only creatures capable of choosing how much of God they allow to live inside them.<sup>19</sup>

ALEX

Free will.

ANGEL

Yes. People tend to understand things when it relates directly to them, so think about terms used about someone's goodness. Someone's "humanity."

ALEX

I see. When someone cares for another, they are being humane, or more human.

GOD 2

Keep going.

(Alex walks a few more steps while thinking out loud.)

ALEX

And when someone seems to be evil, we say they are inhuman. So, those who are most human are most connected to their own spirit and to the spirit of God, while people who commit atrocities are actively rejecting that spirit.

ANGEL

You understand.

ALEX

Everyone who loves others and cares for them is showing God, the divine that lives within us.

ANGEL

Yes.

(Alex continues walking slowly.)

ALEX

So, fighting for justice and equity, feeding the hungry, and working for Just Peace are all ways of showing the divine, even if we are not aware of that when we do it.

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<sup>19</sup> This discussion through the human versus inhuman lines was inspired by page 1 of O'Malley (2000).

GOD 3

We love all of creation. Showing love for each other and all the earth makes our presence known.

ANGEL

God is pleased with your understanding.

ALEX

(singing) "And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love, yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love."<sup>20</sup>  
But many who demonstrate this love are not Christians.

ANGEL

God uses many different people to be present in the world.

ALEX

(stopping) And too many Christians do not act in loving ways.

GOD 1

We are greatly saddened by that.

ALEX

Some believe they are acting out of love, but I am not sure about all of them. I have a hard time accepting people who claim to be Christians and yet harm others out of malice, arrogance, or willful ignorance. I find it much easier to accept and get along with people from other religions or those who have none and act as I think God would want us to in love and humility.

GOD 2

Oh, my child...

ANGEL

"Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them."<sup>21</sup>

ALEX

That's from Matthew, right?

ANGEL

Yes.

ALEX

But there are evil people in the world, ones who rape and kill, whose hatred blinds them to the humanity of others. Or

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<sup>20</sup> The refrain from the Christian hymn "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love."

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 7:20.

worse, those with no conscience at all, the ones who are inhuman.

GOD 3

Some who sow evil walk among you.

ANGEL

Yes, there are those who commit evil deeds.

ALEX

How can such people exist? I know we have free will, but how can someone choose to do such horrible things to another of God's creatures, human or other? Murder is bad enough, but sadists who take pleasure in torturing others, including children...

GOD 1

They do not do my will.

GOD 3

In the end, all the world will know my peace and love.

GOD 2

And you and others who recognize the problems of this world must continue to show my light and love.

ANGEL

You must look with hope for a better future and let that guide you in working to bring it about.

ALEX

I get that. And I try, but sometimes it's all just too much.

(Alex starts to walk slowly toward Angel and God, breaking out of the labyrinth pattern.)

The news is full of natural disasters and climate change deniers, refugees fleeing famine and war. They are desperate for a place they can find safety and food and other basic necessities. And there are racists and xenophobes who murder innocent people because of fear and hatred and extremist nationalism.

GOD 1

Oh, my child...

ALEX

Sometimes it seems like we humans, as a species, are trying to destroy ourselves and each other.

ANGEL

But there is goodness in the world. There are good people. Focus on those who have made a difference for the better. Take



strength and guidance from them.

ALEX

I know there are good people and there always have been, but there have also been Caligula and Dr. Joseph Mengele and terrorists and... too many others, too much evil.

GOD 3

It saddens us, too.

ANGEL

Those things make God sad, too.

ALEX

I get that, but what good does that do? You, God (gesturing toward where God is) I know you are there. You are all powerful. You can change the hearts and open the eyes of mankind. Why do you also harden hearts so that people suffer?

GOD 1

We do not want our children to suffer.

ANGEL

Humans cause suffering.

ALEX

Yes, we do. But God can decide who has mercy and whose hearts are hardened. A Paul wrote, "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden."<sup>22</sup> Have mercy on us!

GOD 3

I wish you could understand.

GOD 2

I wish I could show you.

ALEX

I trust you, and yet how can I trust a God who helped the "chosen people" slaughter their enemies, including the women and children, even the animals. How could animals and children be evil? And after at least one battle you helped them win, the victors could save the virgin women by taking them as wives. Forcing a woman who just watched a man kill her family to then marry that man and bear his children... how is that

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<sup>22</sup> Romans 9:18.

right?

ANGEL

Alex,

ALEX

No! I want to know. I want to understand. I have known God as a loving, caring God who walks with me through my struggles and rejoices with me in triumphs, yet I cannot reconcile that God to the other side of the Divine. There is a part of God I do not know at all, and I don't think I want to know. God, who are you?

GOD

I am love.

ANGEL

God is love.

ALEX

That's no kind of love I've ever heard of; that's cruelty and violence and evil.

GOD 2

You will understand in time.

ANGEL

God is not evil.

ALEX

No, God is not evil, but it seems like God sometimes condones or even encourages evil.

GOD 1

There is so much that people can't comprehend. One day.

ANGEL

I cannot explain it to you now.

ALEX

No! I want to know. I want to understand.

GOD 3

You are not meant to know me fully. Not yet.

ANGEL

It is not yet time for you to know.

ALEX

Not time?! Look around, the angels are pouring out their bowls on our heads... war, famine, locusts, plagues... we've got it all. It sure feels like the end of the world! Isn't that the time to reveal yourself?

GOD 2

You don't understand.

ANGEL

You do not understand.

ALEX

No, I don't. That's why I ask. Are you a wrathful, jealous God after all? You're all powerful. If you are truly a loving parent, why could you not have made people see their errors instead of sending floods and fire to destroy them? Why can't you make all people now see what we are doing to the earth and that we need to fix things before all species become extinct, including ourselves?

GOD 3

We are strengthening the people working to make a difference.

ANGEL

God strengthens those who see and act.

ALEX

But God could just wave a hand and open everyone's eyes.

ANGEL

That is not how God works.

ALEX

(screams) Aaaagh!

(Alex drops to her knees with her head in her hands. For a moment, everyone is silent. God and Angel form a half circle behind her. Angel and God 1 place their hands on Alex's shoulders.)

GOD 1

Feel our love for you, for all our children.

GOD 3

We do not want you to suffer.

GOD

I am with you.

ANGEL

God is here for you.

ALEX

I know, but...

GOD 2

We will never leave you.

GOD 3

But you must learn and grow from this so that you can continue the fight

GOD

my fight

GOD 1

and shine our light into the darkness.

ANGEL

The light shines in the darkness,

ALEX

and the darkness has not overcome it.<sup>23</sup>

ANGEL

Nor will it. You and others who continue to love in words and deeds, you must not give up. The pain and suffering in this world can be overwhelming, but God is stronger. You are stronger, with God.

ALEX

Yes. I can feel the truth of that. But that is not a full answer. I know I need to keep doing, keep fighting, keep loving. Sometimes, it just hurts so much.

ANGEL

God feels your pain. Know that They will never leave you. Nor will I.

ALEX

Thank you for that, at least. And my light can't shine if I give in to the darkness. (Angel nods, then helps Alex to stand up.) I'm not going to get the answers, am I?

GOD 2

Not yet.

ANGEL

No.

ALEX

I thought so. (sighs) I have to keep going, don't I? If I want any answers, I have to keep putting one foot in front of the other.

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<sup>23</sup> John 1:5

GOD 3

Yes, child.

ANGEL

Yes.

(Alex slowly walks back to where she left off in the labyrinth. God moves back to where they were.)

ALEX

I guess I don't have a choice, do I?

ANGEL

You always have a choice.

ALEX

Just like Jonah did..

GOD 1

(to Angel) Tell her we no longer use large sea creatures to force people along their paths.

ANGEL

God says They no longer use large sea creatures to ensure you follow your path.

ALEX

Good to know. (as she begins walking) No sea creatures, but I could go for some extremely large bird, as long as you let me wear a harness for it to grab. Talons... (shudders)

GOD 3

She always did want to fly.

GOD 2

That's it, child, you know your way.

GOD 1

Remember your gifts and draw strength from us.

ANGEL

Trust your steps and draw strength from God. Keep your faith.

ALEX

I will. But it isn't always easy. I know God is there..

GOD 3

Doubt is part of faith, but do not let your light be dimmed by doubts.

ANGEL

For now, that will have to be enough.

ALEX

(As Alex walks, she begins singing the song "Never Enough")  
"but it'll  
Never be enough  
Never be enough  
For me  
Never, never  
Never, never  
Never, for me  
For me..."

GOD 1

Good, she still has her sense of humor.

ANGEL

God is glad you have your sense of humor.

ALEX

That's good. Sometimes I worry a lightning bolt will come from the sky and strike me down.

GOD 2

We're not Zeus.

ANGEL

God is not Zeus.

ALEX

Huh... So Zeus did... does exist? Never mind, I don't think I want to go there now.

GOD

Good.

GOD 3

Just focus on where you need to go.

ANGEL

It is better to keep your focus on where you are and where you are going right now.

ALEX

Agreed, but some day... (Pause) I feel God's presence again. It's comforting.

GOD

I am always present.

ANGEL

God is presence. It is not something God does, but what God

is.<sup>24</sup>

ALEX

I never thought about it that way before, but it makes sense. God does not have to do anything to be present. God simply is.

ANGEL

Yes.

GOD 2

She is progressing in her understanding and on her journey.

ALEX

I know God is. I have no doubt about that, although I think doubt is understandable and a natural part of one's spiritual journey. And I don't think atheists are bad or doomed to Hell.

GOD 1

We're glad. It is not for you to judge.

GOD 2

We are a part of people's lives whether they know it or not. We love all of our children.

ANGEL

God loves all of Their children.

ALEX

Feeling God's presence is a comfort for me, and I feel stronger for it. I do not want to force my beliefs on anyone else but, God, how do I help others know you are here?

GOD 3

Excellent question.

GOD 1

Let our presence show in you.

ANGEL

Let God show through you.

ALEX

I think I know what you mean. As someone who claims a particular faith, especially when I am going to be ordained, I need to be my best self. I need practice the love of God, as shown by Jesus in my own theology, so that others can

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<sup>24</sup> Zaleski 44.

associate faith with that love.

ANGEL

Yes, that is the idea.

ALEX

When I was younger, some people tried to force their idea of God and religion on me. They had the opposite effect than they intended. I wanted no part of their religion or their God. It was my grandmother and other people who had strong faith and showed unconditional love who helped me give religion another chance.

GOD 3

Yes, you have had people who allowed me to shine brightly threw them in your life.

ALEX

I want to emulate them. My grandmother was a devout Catholic and regularly attended church, but some who helped foster my belief in a divine higher power, God, are not regular church goers. There are still times when I get so fed up with self-righteous, hypocritical "Christians" that I doubt the value of religion. But I also know I would not have the faith and spiritual connection I have without being part of a church.

GOD 2

We love it when people come together in our name as a community, but some people have more individual spiritual journeys. We would rather people connect to us in some way even if they cannot find a faith community that welcomes them.

GOD 1

And we are sad when someone turns others away from us because of harsh judgements and narrowmindedness. One of your gifts is love. Use it for Our good.

ANGEL

Continue to do your best to love and care for others.

ALEX

I will do my best.

GOD 3

That is what we ask.

ALEX

Angel, I know God is with me. Will you always be with me?

ANGEL

Like God, I will always be with you, at least while you are on Earth. But I am the messenger, not the Creator.



ALEX

I understand that. I am glad I can see you sometimes, even if I cannot see God directly.

GOD

Angel.

(God gestures for Angel to approach, then tells Angel something quietly.)

ANGEL

(Looking at Alex.) You have been chosen for a special gift. Today, if you so choose, you may see an aspect of God that you can comprehend. Do you wish it?

ALEX

See God? Yes. Please.

(Alex sees God for the first time. Angel retreats to the edge of the stage to give space for God and Alex to connect.)

GOD

My child.

ALEX

You appear to me now as three people. I've come to know you as the triune God. Are you all different Gods?

GOD

We are God. I AM.

ALEX

And you are all different.

GOD 2

What you see is only part of who we are.

ALEX

Is that why we are all so different?

GOD 1

Yes, people were created in our image.

GOD 3

One person cannot completely bear our image.

GOD 2

We created you all very different so that you could get to

know each other<sup>25</sup> and to know me better.

ALEX

I think I've heard that before.

GOD 1

People are our image bearers. Learn about each other, your hopes, your dreams, the light that lives in each of you.

GOD 3

I am the light. When you see the light in another, you see me. When you let your own light shine, you show me to others. That is the way to overcome the darkness.

ALEX

You are so vast, so unlimited. How can I ever hope to know you? Even if I get to know many people, you are infinite.

GOD

One day you will see me.

GOD 2

You will fully live in our light.

ALEX

I have heard that your light is brighter than the sun, but it does not blind us.

GOD 3

Just because you do not know me fully, does not mean you cannot be fully in relationship with me.

GOD 1

You are here for a reason. Everyone is.

ALEX

Even those who commit horrible acts?

GOD 2

Some choose to turn away from their purpose and from us. We do not wish our children to suffer, but we are much pleased with those who grow from their struggles and become more loving and compassionate to others.

GOD 1

Do not let allow hatred to grow in your heart. Hatred begets

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<sup>25</sup> This idea is from The Quran 49:13. The remainder of the sentence is not.

hatred.

GOD 3

All who walk their paths in love will find their way to me. We want all our children to come home to us. When you are with me in eternity, you will see and understand.

ALEX

Sometimes I long for that day.

GOD 1

You must first finish your journey in this life before moving on to the next.

ALEX

If I focus only on my own path, how will I get to know others?

GOD 2

You each walk your own path, but get to know others on different paths. That way you may learn about and from one another.

GOD 3

Building relationships helps people understand and care about others. To love others.

ALEX

The greatest commandments are to love God and to love one another.<sup>26</sup>

GOD

I am love.

GOD 1

And the part of me that dwells in you is love.

ALEX

My questions earlier... I know I cannot know everything now, but is love part of the answer?

GOD 2

It is the main answer.

GOD 1

Life on earth is difficult. We know there is pain, grief, and darkness.

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<sup>26</sup> This line references Mark 12:30-31, Matthew 22:37-39, and John 13:34

GOD 3

We did not create these, but they are a part of your existence.

GOD 2

And you will have to face them, as you know. As you already have. But there is also joy, beauty, and love.

ALEX

And I must remember them even when things are terrible.

GOD 1

Yes. And help others remember them as well. I am presence. Sometimes the best you can do for someone else is to be present.

ALEX

Sometimes we all forget that you are here. Sometimes we have doubts about our faith. But remembering and feeling that someone cares...

GOD 3

Yes. As we said, humans have free will. We cannot force anyone to choose to accept or believe in us.

GOD 2

But we are always here. And finding love and light in the world will help you get through the darkest times.

ALEX

And sharing it with others lights my own way as well.

GOD 1

Yes. (Pause) Remember us on your journey. We will not remain visible to you, not as we are now. Remember to keep looking for us in the world around you.

ALEX

Because I will see you.

GOD

Yes.

ALEX

Thank you. For everything.

GOD 3

Bless you.

GOD 2

You must return to your path now. And remember that

GOD

I am with you.

(God 3 gestures to the Angel to approach. God moves slowly away with their hands over their hearts. They pause toward stage right. Angel nears Alex, who can no longer see God or Angel.)

ALEX

Goodbye... no, not goodbye. Thank you.

(Alex begins walking back in the labyrinth pattern. Angel lightly touches Alex's shoulder. Alex smiles and continues walking as the lights fade to black except for a single spotlight. Alex walks into that light to address the audience one more time.)

I hope you have enjoyed this production. If you are able, please stick around for the discussion. Heather added some discussion questions at the end of her thesis in the hope that people would keep talking about the themes and questions raised within the play. OK, she also wanted to ensure that the thesis was long enough, but the *main* reason was to stimulate contemplation and sharing. She knows there are many questions left unanswered and that some of the answers provided may seem too simplistic for some. One suggestion she received during the writing process was to add Satan as a character to heighten the conflict and provide more for discussion. If she ever expands the play to full length, this is a possibility. Heather does wonder about how a director would/should cast that role, but that is a future consideration. For now, he (she?) can remain offstage. And before you ask, although she is Christian, Heather intentionally did not specify which of the three actors playing God is which part of the triune God.

We would love to hear your thoughts on what we have presented today. Whether you stay or not, Heather wishes you all love and joy. May you all find and walk your paths with confidence, trusting your steps and taking the time to learn from and care for others as we all continue our journeys through this crazy, broken, and beautiful world.

**THE END**

## Works Cited

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## DISCUSSION

After the conclusion of the play, I suggest a discussion for those who wish to share their reactions and thoughts. Whoever leads the discussion could begin with asking the audience's first impressions. Then, I would like the audience as well as everyone involved with the production to be able to ask questions of each other. I have provided the following lists of questions in case they are needed and as suggestions for good topics. The following can serve as possible questions for the audience:

1. Did anything in *Crossing the Divine* surprise you? If so, what?
2. Is there anything you think about differently now?
3. Did anything resonate with you?
4. Have you ever felt like there was a higher power guiding your path in life? If you are willing, would you give a brief description of that time?
5. If you were the playwright, what, if anything, would you do differently?
6. Did it bother you not to have the Father (or Creator) God, Son, and Holy Ghost clearly delineated? What difference would it have made to have them identified? Why do you think they were not?
7. Do you believe that people with conflicting spiritual beliefs and practices can learn from each other?

8. Can someone with deeply held religious or spiritual beliefs accept people with very different beliefs or practices without lessening their own?
9. What, if anything, do you disagree with in the play?
10. Do you expect to meet God one day?
11. If you were to meet God, what do you think he/she/they would be like?
12. Do you have any questions for the playwright (if present), director, or actors?

The following set of questions should be directed to the cast, director, and playwright. (Some are intentionally worded in a way to be a little funny to try to get people to relax and have fun while still covering potentially serious topics.)

1. For God I, God 2, and God 3, what was it like to play God?
2. Also, for GOD, did you find any parts of the script challenging to play?
3. (If the playwright is present) What inspired you to write this?
4. Also, for the Miss Wakefield, what was the most difficult part to write?
5. For the director, what did you find challenging in understanding and/or directing about the script?
6. For Angel, we can't forget about you. How do you understand your role?
7. For everyone involved in the production, did you find



yourself contemplating your own spirituality or understanding of God?

8. What, if anything, are you taking away from this experience?

Other questions from or to the audience, cast, director, or playwright are welcome. If possible, allow time for one last part of the discussion. I would like the following question to be posed to everyone:

If you could ask God one question and get an answer, what would it be?