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## Costumes and Disguises

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## Costumes and Disguises

One Halloween, I walked around parts of a college campus where I was rather well known, wearing a mechanic's coveralls, dark glasses, and a ski cap. I also walked as though one leg was stiff. No one recognized me. Very soon, the pleasure of the "perfect disguise" gave way to a sense of isolation and separation from those I had thought to entertain. Unless one is a spy, what good is a disguise if the secret is not discovered so as to become a source of shared pleasure? We enjoy recognizing others and being recognized by them in spite of changes we make to our expected appearance or manner of acting.

When God uses a disguise, it is for our sake: for the joy that is ours when, appreciating the actions of people in our lives, we come to recognize also some aspects of God that we would not otherwise have perceived. God is always God, just as we are always ourselves no matter how we might appear to others. But we learn about one another through many individual encounters, not through one single meeting. We might learn through a helpful conference with a medical person or a counselor that God is also for us a healer. That is, we benefit from what another person does for us, and in a moment of reflection we are surprised to recognize that God was also present in the circumstances, skills, and care of that person. The experience of such discoveries does not diminish the significance of the human persons who help us, but increases with our awareness of the simultaneous presence of God. The joyful surprise we receive is the wider, deeper, broader vision of God's love and care coming to us in, with, and through all the positive human interactions we have, as well as from our direct experiences of God.

Most forms of acting, from major stage plays and films to children's productions for family members, make use of costumes in order to help set a context and to approximate the appearance of represented persons. Whether costumes are carefully designed or spontaneously put together from immediately accessible materials, audiences agree to use their imaginations so that the attire becomes integral to the story presented by the actors.

Many stories that come to us from Scripture, religious traditions, and other trusted sources include mention of persons who bear to individuals and communities Godly messages, helpful guidance, and powerful challenges, and who seem to be sometimes humans, sometimes God. Perhaps, for our benefit, we can rightly consider that all the characters depicted as providing instruction, inspiration, and

help of any kind in and through such stories are all really of God, in costume. Why would God appear in a variety of ways, unless to draw us into those stories and gift us with the pleasure of discovery? We are sometimes direct in our manifestations of friendship and in our caring for one another, and at other times we leave messages or do things that our recipients might later come to understand as gifts from us. God is like that, and shares with us a propensity towards expressing love creatively through the use of our imagination.

We cannot help but have concepts of God, just as we do of everyone we know. Do the images in our minds fully coincide with who the other persons are? No more than anyone else's ideas of us can encompass all of our personality and previous experiences. One of the ways God helps us to continue adjusting and expanding our concepts in the relationship is through the use of costumes and disguises. By appearing to us in forms we can immediately accept, God helps us to move past or through some of the false or limited ideas we might have. By means of the surprises and revelations of God we find through those costumes and disguises, all the stories become the one story of God and us.

We do not have to work at discovering God in our world of persons; God is carefully using costumes and disguises to make the revelations work for us.