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***BBC Radio Talk Entitled “Beyond Personality”***

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In these talks, I've had to say a good deal about prayer. And before going on to my main subject tonight, I'd like to deal with a difficulty some people find about the whole idea of prayer. Somebody put it to me by saying: "I can believe in God alright, but what I can't swallow is this idea of Him listening to several hundred million human beings who are all addressing Him at the same moment."

And I find quite a lot of people feel that difficulty.

Well, the first thing to notice is that the whole sting of it comes in the words "at the same moment." Most of us can imagine a God attending to any number of claimants if only they come one by one and He has an endless time to do it in. So what's really at the back of the difficulty is this idea of God having to fit too many things into one moment of time.

Well that, of course, is what happens to us. Our life comes to us moment by moment. One moment disappears before the next comes along, and there's room for precious little in each. That's what Time is like. And, of course, you and I tend to take it for granted that this Time series -- this arrangement of past, present and future -- isn't simply the way life comes to us but is the way all things really exist. We tend to assume that the whole universe and God Himself are always moving on from a past to a future just as we are. But many learned men don't agree with that. I think it was the Theologians who first started the idea that some things are not in Time at all. Later, the Philosophers took it over. And now some of the scientists are doing the same.

Almost certainly God is not in Time. His life doesn't consist of moments following one another. If a million people are praying to Him at ten-thirty tonight, He hasn't got to listen to them all in that one little snippet which we call "ten-thirty." Ten-thirty, and every other moment from the beginning to the end of the world, is always the Present for Him. If you like to put it that way, He has infinity in which to listen to the split second of prayer put up by a pilot as his plane crashes in flames.

That's difficult, I know. Can I try to give something, not the same, but a bit like it. Suppose I'm writing a novel. I write "Mary laid down her book; next moment came a knock at the door." For Mary, who's got to live in the imaginary time of the story, there's no interval between putting down the book and hearing the knock. But I, her creator, between writing the first part of that sentence and the second, may have gone out for an hour's walk and spent the whole hour thinking about Mary.



I know that's not a perfect example, but it may just give a glimpse of what I mean. The point I want to drive home is that God has infinite attention, infinite leisure to spare for each one of us. He doesn't have to take us in the line. You're as much alone with Him as if you were the only thing He'd ever created.

When Christ died, He died for you individually just as much as if you'd been the only man in the world.

Now, I'll get back to my main subject.

I was pointing out last time that the Christian life is simply a process of having your natural self changed into a Christ self, and that this process goes on very far inside. One's most private wishes, one's point of view, are the things that have to be changed. That's why unbelievers complain that Christianity's a very selfish religion. "Isn't it very selfish, even morbid," they say, "to be always bothering about the inside of your own soul instead of thinking of humanity?"

Now, what would an NCO say to a soldier who had a dirty rifle and when told to clean it replied, "But sergeant, isn't it very selfish, even morbid, to be always bothering about the inside of your own rifle instead of thinking of the United Nations?" Well, we needn't bother about what the NCO would actually say. You see the point. The man is not going to be of much use to the United Nations if his rifle isn't fit to shoot quickly. In the same way, people who are still acting from their old natural selves won't do much real permanent good to other people.

Let me explain that.

History isn't just the story of bad people doing bad things. It's quite as much a story of people trying to do good things. But somehow, something goes wrong. Take the common expression: "cold as charity." How'd we come to say that? From experience. We've learned how unsympathetic and patronizing and conceited charitable people often are. And yet hundreds and thousands of them started out really anxious to do good, and when they'd done it, somehow it just wasn't as good as it ought to have been.

The old story: What you are comes out in what you do. A crabapple tree can't produce eating apples. As long as the old self is there its taint will be over all we do. We try to be religious and become Pharisees. We try to be kind and become patronizing. Social service ends in red tape of officialdom. Unselfishness becomes a form of showing off.

I don't mean of course that we're to stop trying to be good. We've got to do the best we can. If the soul's just fool enough to go into battle with a dirty rifle he mustn't run away. But I do mean that the real cure lies far deeper. Out of our self and into Christ we must go.

The change won't for most of us happen suddenly. And I must admit that for most Christians it will only be beginning to the very end of our present lives. But there are some in whom it goes further, even before death, far enough for you to see it.



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There very faces and voices are different. When you meet them, you know you're up against something which, so to speak, begins where you leave off; something stronger, quieter, happier, more alive than ordinary humanity.

Now that's just where Christianity, as I think, has the real answer to a question a lot of modern people are asking. Everyone's heard of evolution, how man evolved from lower types of life. And people often ask, "What's the next step?" "When is the thing beyond man going to appear?" Some imaginative writers even try to picture what the next step will be like, but they usually end in nonsense about men with six arms or wings or something of that type.

But the Christians think those people are on the wrong tack. The next step has already appeared. The next step is from being mere creatures to being sons of God. The new kind of man appeared in Christ, and other new men, little "christs," already to be found sorted here and there about the earth.

We Christians don't call it "evolution" because we believe it isn't something coming up out of blind Nature but something coming down from the world of light and power and knowledge beyond all Nature. But if you like to call it "evolution," do. The next step is here. You can become one of the new men in Christ if you like. Or, if you prefer, you can refuse the step and sink back.

Now if we take the step, it involves losing what we now call our "selves." That doesn't mean that all people who accept Christ are going to be exactly like one another. I know it sounds as if it did. If there's one Christ, and He's to be in us all, actually replacing our personalities with His own, what difference will there be between us?

Now here I've got a rather difficult thing to say. On the one hand, it isn't true that we shall lose our personal differences by letting Christ take us over. On the other hand, I don't think Christ can take us over as long as we're bothering about what will happen to our personality. Let's take the first point first.

If a person didn't know about salt, wouldn't he think that anything with such a strong taste would kill the taste of all the other things in any dish you put it into? We know, as a matter of fact, it brings out the real taste.

Well, it's rather like that with Christ. When you've completely given up your-self to His personality you will then, for the first time in your life, be developing into a real person. He made the whole world. He invented it as an author invents characters in a book, all different men that you and I were intended to be.

Our real selves are, so to speak, all waiting for us in Him. What I call my "self" now is hardly a person at all. It's mainly a meeting place for various natural forces, desires, and fears, etcetera, some of which come from my ancestors, and some from my education, some perhaps from devils. The self you were really intended to be is something that lives not from nature but from God.



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At the beginning of these talks, I said there were personalities in God. Well, I go further now: There are no real personalities anywhere else -- I mean no full, complete personalities. It's only when you allow yourself to be drawn into His life that you turn into a true person.

But on the other hand, it's just no good at all going to Christ for the sake of divinity or for a personality. As long as that's what you're bothering about you haven't begun, because the very first step towards getting a real self is to forget about the self. It will come only if you're looking for something else. That holds, you know, even for earthly matters: Even in literature or art, no man who cares about originality will ever be original. It's the man who's only thinking about doing a good job or telling the truth who becomes really original -- and doesn't notice it. Even in social life you'll never make a good impression on other people until you stop thinking what sort of impression you make.

That principle runs all through life from the top to the bottom: Give up yourself and you'll find your real self. Lose your life and you'll save it. Submit to death, submit with every fiber of your Being and you'll find eternal life. Look for Christ and you'll get Him, and with Him, everything else thrown in. Look for yourself and you'll get only hatred, loneliness, despair, and ruin.

Research Note: Parts of this BBC talk were later published in modified form in C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* (see, for example, Chapter 25 -- "Time and Beyond Time.").