

# **Beyond Personality**

**The Christian Idea of God**

**C. S. Lewis**

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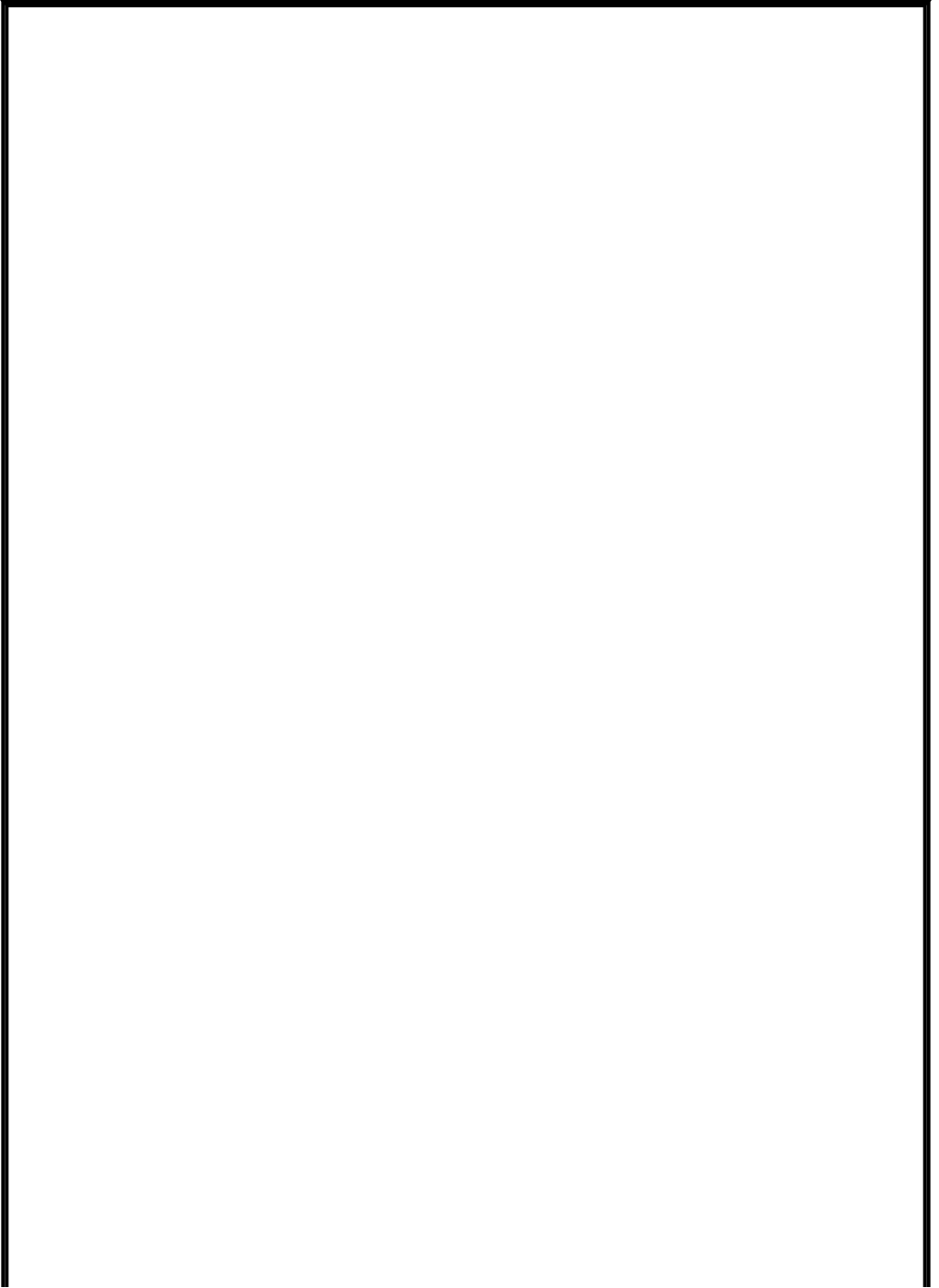


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# BEYOND PERSONALITY

## *The Christian Idea of God*

by

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# PREFACE

These Talks attempt to put into simple modern language the account of God which, to the best of my knowledge, the vast majority of Christian churches have agreed in giving for a great many centuries. I have tried to explain in previous talks why I think Christianity true. Here I am not trying to prove anything; only to describe what the Christian belief is. It is hoped that this may be of some use both to those who accept Christianity and to those who don't: indeed it is not much good discussing whether certain beliefs are true before we know what they are. Some listeners were offended because I used the words 'Christian belief' to describe the doctrines officially held by organised Christianity at nearly all times and in nearly all countries. They themselves, though claiming to be Christians, differed from this official belief on certain points, and they were annoyed because I seemed to be saying that they were therefore no Christians: and 'Who's he', they asked, 'to lay down who is a Christian and who is not?' In reality I was not attempting (in the sense they mean) to lay down anything of the sort. If anyone was asked to give an account, say, of Mohammedanism in seven very short talks he would be forced to concentrate on the general central Mohammedan tradition. He simply wouldn't have time to go into minor variations, still less to deal with the beliefs of individual Mohammedans. In his talks the word 'Mohammedanism' would simply *have* to be used to mean that permanent central tradition. I dealt with Christianity in the same way. I should have had to do so even if I personally did not regard the central tradition as being Christianity at its truest. In

point of fact I do regard it as true, and consequently I must think that those who depart from it are mistaken. Some people say this attitude is 'intolerant'. 'He's the sort of man', they complain, 'who thinks his own beliefs are true and everyone else's are wrong.' But after all how can any man help doing that? A man must think his own belief true because if he didn't it would not be his belief. 'Your belief' *means* 'what you think true'. And if you think one thing true, of course you must think the opposite false. But this is a very different thing from saying that those who hold the opposite belief are necessarily bad or stupid. There is a deeper sense of the word 'Christian' in which some who hold wrong beliefs may be more Christian than some who hold the right ones. Christ, who can see into their hearts, may recognise them as His own, and more His own than many of the orthodox. Needless to say, I never dreamed of laying down who was a 'Christian' in *that* sense. It would have been the grossest impudence for me even to raise the question, for neither I nor any mortal can possibly know the answer.

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*April 15th, 1944*

C. S. LEWIS

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# I

## MAKING AND BEGETTING

Everyone has warned me not to tell you what I'm going to tell you in these talks. They all say 'the ordinary listener doesn't want Theology; you give him plain practical religion'. I have rejected their advice. I don't think the ordinary listener is such a fool. Theology means 'the science of God', and I think any man who wants to think about God at all would like to have the clearest and most accurate ideas about Him which are available. You're not children: why should you be treated like children?

In a way I quite understand why some people are put off by Theology. I remember once when I'd been giving a talk to the R.A.F., an old, hard-bitten officer got up and said, 'I've no use for all that stuff. But, mind you, I'm a religious man too. I *know* there's a God. I've *felt* Him: out alone in the desert at night: the tremendous mystery. And that's just why I don't believe all your neat little dogmas and formulas about Him. To anyone who's met the real thing they all seem so petty and pedantic and unreal!'

Now in a sense I quite agreed with that man. I think he'd probably had a real experience of God in the desert. And when he turned from that experience to the Christian creeds, I think he was really turning from something quite real to something less real. In the same way, if a man has once looked at the Atlantic from the beach, and then goes and looks at a map of the Atlantic,

he also will be turning from something more real to something less real: turning from real waves to a bit of coloured paper. But here comes the point. The map is only coloured paper, but there are two things you have to remember about it. In the first place, it is based on what hundreds and thousands of people have found out by sailing the real Atlantic. In that way it has behind it masses of experience just as real as the one you could have from the beach; only, while yours would be a single isolated glimpse, the map fits all those different experiences together. In the second place, if you want to go anywhere, the map is absolutely necessary. As long as you're content with walks on the beach, your own glimpses are far more fun than looking at a map. But the map's going to be more use than walks on the beach if you want to get to America.

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Well, Theology's like the map. Merely learning and thinking about the Christian doctrines, if you stop there, is less real and less exciting than the sort of thing my friend got in the desert. Doctrines aren't God: they're only a kind of map. But that map's based on the experience of hundreds of people who really were in touch with God—experiences compared with which any thrills or pious feelings you and I are likely to get on our own are very elementary and very confused. And secondly, if you want to get any further, you must use the map. You see, what happened to that man in the desert may have been real, and was certainly exciting, but nothing comes of it. It *leads* nowhere. There's nothing to *do* about it. In fact, that's just why a vague religion—all about feeling God in nature, and so on—is so attractive. It's all thrills and no work; like watching the waves from the beach. But you won't get to Newfoundland by studying the Atlantic that way, and you won't get eternal life by just feeling the presence of God in flowers or music. Neither will

you get anywhere by looking at maps without going to sea. And you won't be very safe if you go to sea without a map.

In other words, Theology is practical: specially now. In the old days, when there wasn't much education or discussion, perhaps it was possible to get on with a very few, simple ideas about God. But it isn't now. Everyone reads, everyone hears things discussed. Consequently, if you don't listen to Theology, that won't mean that you have no ideas about God. It'll mean that you'll have a lot of wrong ones—bad, muddled, out-of-date ideas. For a great many of the ideas about God which are trotted out as novelties today, are simply the ones which real Theologians tried centuries ago and rejected. To believe in the popular religion of modern England is simply putting the clock back—like believing the earth is flat. 11

For when you get down to it, isn't the popular idea of Christianity just this? That Jesus Christ was a great moral teacher and that if only we took his advice we might be able to establish a better social order and avoid another war? Now, mind you, that is quite true. But it tells you very *little* about Christianity and it has no *practical* importance at all.

It's quite true that if we took Christ's advice we should soon be living in a happier world. You needn't even go as far as Christ. If we did all that Plato or Aristotle or Confucius told us, we'd get on a great deal better than we do. And so what? We never have followed the advice of the great teachers. Why are we likely to begin now? Why are we more likely to follow Christ than any of the others? Because he's the best moral teacher? But that makes it even less likely that we shall follow him. If we can't take the elementary lessons, is it likely we're going to take

the most advanced one? If Christianity only means one more bit of good advice, then Christianity is of no importance. There's been no lack of good advice for the last four thousand years. A bit more makes no difference.

But as soon as you look at any real Christian writings, you find that they're talking about something quite different from this popular religion. They say that Christ is the Son of God (whatever that means). They say that those who give Him their confidence can also become Sons of God (whatever that means). They say that His death saved us from our sins (whatever that means).

There's no good complaining that these statements are difficult. Christianity claims to be telling us about another world, about something *behind* the world we can touch and hear and see. You may think the claim false; but if it were true, what it tells us would be bound to be difficult—at least as difficult as modern Physics, and for the same reason. 12

Now the point in Christianity which gives us the greatest shock is the statement that by attaching ourselves to Christ, we can 'become Sons of God'. One asks 'Aren't we Sons of God already? Surely the fatherhood of God is one of the main Christian ideas?' Well, in a certain sense, no doubt we are Sons of God already. I mean, God has brought us into existence and loves us and looks after us, and in that way is like a father. But when the Bible talks of our *becoming* Sons of God, obviously it must mean something different. And that brings us up against the very centre of Theology.

One of the creeds says that Christ is the Son of God 'begotten,

not created’; and it adds ‘begotten by his Father before all worlds’. Will you please get it quite clear that this has nothing to do with the fact that when Christ was born on earth as a man, that man was the son of a virgin? We are not now thinking about the Virgin Birth. We’re thinking about something that happened before Nature was created at all, before time began. ‘Before all worlds’ Christ is begotten, not created. What does it mean?

We don’t use the words *begetting* or *begotten* much in modern English, but everyone still knows what they mean. To beget is to become the father of: to create is to make. And the difference is just this. When you beget, you beget something of the same kind as yourself. A man begets human babies, a beaver begets little beavers and a bird begets eggs which turn into little birds. But when you make, you make something of a different kind from yourself. A bird makes a nest, a beaver builds a dam, a man makes a wireless set—or he may make something more like himself than a wireless set: say, a statue. If he’s a clever enough carver he may make a statue which is very like a man indeed. But, of course, it’s not a real man; it only looks like one. It can’t breathe or think. It’s not alive.

Now that’s the first thing to get clear. What God begets is God; just as what man begets is man. What God creates is not God; just as what man makes is not man. That is why men are not Sons of God in the sense that Christ is. They may be like God in certain ways, but they are not things of the same kind. They are more like statues or pictures of God.

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A statue has the shape of a man but it’s not alive. In the same way, man has (in a sense I’m going to explain) the ‘shape’ or likeness of God, but he has not got the kind of life God has. Let

us take the first point (man's resemblance to God) first. Everything God has made has *some* likeness to Himself. Space is like Him in its hugeness: not that the greatness of space is the same *kind* of greatness as God's, but it's a sort of symbol of it, or a translation of it into non-spiritual terms. Matter is like God in having energy: though, again, of course, physical energy is a different *kind* of thing from the power of God. The vegetable world is like Him because it is alive, and He is the 'living God'. But life, in this biological sense, is not the same as the life there is in God: it is only a kind of symbol or shadow of it. When we come on to the animals, we find other kinds of resemblance in addition to biological life. The intense activity and fertility of the insects, for example, is a first dim resemblance to the unceasing activity and the creativeness of God. In the higher mammals we get the beginnings of instinctive affection. That isn't the same thing as the love that exists in God: but it is like it—rather in the way that a picture drawn on a flat piece of paper can nevertheless be 'like' a landscape. When we come to man, the highest of the animals, we get the completest resemblance to God which we know of. (There may be creatures in other worlds who are more like God than man is, but we don't know about that.) Man not only lives, but loves and reasons: biological life reaches its highest known level in him.

But what man, in his natural condition, has not got, is Spiritual life—the higher and different sort of life that exists in God. We use the same word *life* for both: but if you thought that both must therefore be the same sort of thing, that would be like thinking that the 'greatness' of space and the 'greatness' of God were the same sort of greatness. In reality, the difference between Biological life and Spiritual life is so important that I'm going to give them two distinct names. The Biological sort

which comes to us through Nature, and which (like everything else in Nature) is always tending to run down and decay so that it can only be kept up by incessant subsidies from Nature in the form of air, water, food etc., is *Bios*. The Spiritual life which is in God from all eternity, and which made the whole natural universe, is *Zoe*. *Bios* has, to be sure, a certain shadowy or symbolic resemblance to *Zoe*: but only the sort of resemblance there is between a photo and a place, or a statue and a man. A man who changed from having *Bios* to having *Zoe* would have gone through as big a change as a statue which changed from being a carved stone to being a real man.

And that is just precisely what Christianity is about. This world is a great sculptor's shop. We are the statues and there is a rumour going round the shop that some of us are some day going to come to life.



## II

# THE THREE-PERSONAL GOD

Last week I was talking about the difference between begetting and making. A man begets a child, but he only makes a statue. God begets Christ but He only makes men. But by saying that, I've illustrated only one point about God, namely, that what God the Father begets is God, something of the same kind as Himself. In that way it is like a human father begetting a human son. But not quite like it. So I must try to explain a little more.

A good many people nowadays say, 'I believe in a God, but not in a personal God'. They feel that the mysterious something which is behind all other things must be more than a person. Now the Christians quite agree. But the Christians are the only people who offer any idea of what a being that is beyond personality could be like. All the other people, though they say that God is *beyond* personality, really think of Him as something impersonal: that is, as something *less* than personal. If you are looking for something super-personal, something *more* than a person, then it isn't a question of choosing between the Christian idea and the other ideas. The Christian idea is the only one on the market.

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Again, some people think that after this life, or perhaps after several lives, human souls will be 'absorbed' into God. But when they try to explain what they mean, they seem to be thinking of our being absorbed into God as one material thing is absorbed into another. They say it's like a drop of water

slipping into the sea. But of course that's the end of the drop. If that's what happens to us, then being absorbed is the same as ceasing to exist. It's only the Christians who have any idea of how human souls can be taken into the life of God and yet remain themselves—in fact, be very much more themselves than they were before.

I warned you that Theology is practical. The whole purpose for which we exist is to be thus taken into the life of God. Wrong ideas about what that life is, will make it harder. And now, for a few minutes, I must ask you to follow rather carefully.

You know that in space you can move in three ways—to left or right, backwards or forwards, up or down. Every direction is either one of these three or a compromise between them. They are called the three Dimensions. Now notice this. If you're using only one dimension, you could draw only a straight line. If you're using two, you could draw a figure: say, a square. And a square is made up of four straight lines. Now a step further. If you have three dimensions, you can then build what we call a solid body: say, a cube—a thing like a dice or a lump of sugar. And a cube is made up of six squares.

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Do you see the point? A world of one dimension would be a world of straight lines. In a two-dimensional world, you still get straight lines, but many lines make one figure. In a three-dimensional world, you still get figures but many figures make one solid body. In other words, as you advance to more real and more complicated levels, you don't leave behind you the things you found on the simpler levels; you still have them, but combined in new ways—in ways you couldn't imagine if you knew only the simpler levels.

Now the Christian account of God involves just the same principle. The human level is a simple and rather empty level. On the human level one person is one being, and any two persons are two separate beings—just as, in two dimensions (say on a flat sheet of paper) one square is one figure, and any two squares are two separate figures. On the Divine level you still find personalities; but up there you find them combined in new ways which we, who don't live on that level, can't imagine. In God's dimension, so to speak, you find a being who is three Persons while remaining one Being, just as a cube is six squares while remaining one cube. Of course we can't fully conceive a Being like that: just as, if we were so made that we perceived only two dimensions in space we could never properly imagine a cube. But we can get a sort of faint notion of it. And when we do we are then, for the first time in our lives, getting some positive idea, however faint, of something super-personal—something more than a person. It is something we could never have guessed, and yet, once we *have* been told, one almost feels one ought to have been able to guess it because it fits in so well with all the things we know already.

You may ask, 'If we can't imagine a three-personal Being, what is the good of talking about Him?' Well, there isn't any good in *talking* about Him. The thing that matters is being actually drawn into that three-personal life, and that may begin any time—to-night, if you like.

17

What I mean is this. An ordinary simple Christian kneels down to say his prayers. He is trying to get into touch with God. But if he is a Christian he knows that what is prompting him to pray is also God: God, so to speak, inside him. But he also knows that all his real knowledge of God comes through Christ, the Man

who was God—that Christ is standing beside him, helping him to pray, praying for him. You see what is happening. God is the thing beyond the whole universe *to* which he is praying—the goal he’s trying to reach. God is also the thing inside him which is pushing him on—the motive power. God is also the road or bridge along which he is being pushed to that goal. So that the whole threefold life of the three-personal Being is actually going on in that ordinary little bedroom where an ordinary man is saying his prayers. The man is being caught up into the higher kind of life—what I called *Zoe* or spiritual life: he is being pulled into God, by God, while still remaining himself.

And that is how Theology started. People already knew about God in a vague way. Then came a man who claimed to *be* God; and yet He wasn’t the sort of man you could dismiss as a lunatic. He made them believe Him. They met Him again after they’d seen Him killed. And then, after they had been formed into a little society or community, they found God somehow inside them as well: directing them, making them able to do things they couldn’t do before. And when they worked it all out they found they’d got the Christian definition of the three-personal God.

You see, it isn’t something made up—Theology is, in a sense, experimental knowledge. It’s the simple religions that are the made-up ones. When I say it’s an experimental science ‘in a sense’, I mean it’s like the other experimental sciences in some ways, but not in all. If you’re a geologist studying rocks, you’ve got to go and find the rocks. They won’t come to you, and if you go to them they can’t run away. The initiative, so to speak, lies all on your side. They can’t either help or hinder. But suppose you’re a zoologist and want to take photos of wild

animals in their native haunts. Well, that's a bit different from studying rocks. The wild animals won't come to you: but they can run away from you. If you don't keep very quiet, they will. There's beginning to be a tiny little trace of initiative on their side.

Now a stage higher, suppose you want to get to know a human person. If he's determined not to let you, you won't get to know him. You've got to win his confidence. In this case the initiative is equally divided—it takes two to make a friendship.

When you come to knowing God, the initiative lies on His side. If He doesn't show Himself, nothing you can do will enable you to find Him. And, in fact, He shows much more of Himself to some people than to others—not because He has favourites, but because it is impossible for Him to show Himself to a man whose whole mind and character are in the wrong condition. Just as sunlight, though it has no favourites, can't be reflected in a dusty mirror as clearly as in a clean one.

You can put this another way by saying that while in other sciences the instruments you use are things external to yourself (things like microscopes and telescopes), the instrument through which you see God is your whole self. And if a man's self isn't kept clean and bright, his glimpse of God will be blurred—like the Moon seen through a dirty telescope. That's why horrible nations have horrible religions: they've been looking at God through a dirty lens.

God can show Himself as He really is only to *real* men. And that means not simply to men who are individually good, but to men who are united together in a body, loving one another,

helping one another, showing Him to one another. For that is what God meant humanity to be like; like players in one band, or organs in one body.

Consequently, the one really adequate instrument for learning about God, is the whole Christian community, waiting for Him *together*. Christian brotherhood is, so to speak, the technical equipment for this science—the laboratory outfit. That’s why all these people who turn up every few years with some patent simplified religion of their own as a substitute for the Christian tradition are really wasting time. Like a man who has no instrument but an old pair of field glasses setting out to put all the real astronomers right. He may be a clever chap—he may be cleverer than some of the real astronomers, but he isn’t giving himself a chance. And two years later everyone has forgotten all about him, but the real science is still going on.

19

If Christianity was something we were making up, of course we could make it easier. But it isn’t. We can’t compete, in simplicity, with people who are *inventing* religions. How could we? We’re dealing with Fact. *Of course* anyone can be simple if he has no facts to bother about!

### III

## TIME AND BEYOND TIME

It is a very silly idea that in reading a book you must never ‘skip’. All sensible people skip freely when they come to a chapter which they find is going to be no good to them. In this chapter I am going to talk about something which may be helpful to some readers, but which may seem to others merely an unnecessary complication. If you are one of the second sort of readers, then I advise you not to bother about this chapter at all but to turn on to the next.

In the last talk I had to touch on the subject of prayer, and while that is still fresh in your mind and my own, I’d like to deal with a difficulty that some people find about the whole idea of prayer. A man put it to me by saying ‘I can believe in God all right, but what I can’t swallow is the idea of Him attending to several hundred million human beings who are all addressing Him at the same moment!’ And I’ve found that quite a lot of people feel this.

20

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 God attending to any number of claimants if only they came one by one and He had an endless time to do it in. So what’s really at the back of this difficulty is the idea of God having to fit too many things into one moment of time.

Well that is of course 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 past to future just as we do. But many learned men don't agree with that. 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 does not consist of moments following one another. If a million people are praying to Him at ten-thirty to-night, 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 of the world—is always the Present for Him. If you like to put it that way, He has all eternity 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. Let me 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 has to live in the imaginary time of my story there's no interval between putting down the book and hearing the knock. But I, who am Mary's maker, don't live in that imaginary time at all. Between writing the first half of that sentence and the second, I might sit down for three hours and think steadily about Mary. I could think about Mary as if she were the only character in the book and for as long as I pleased, and the hours I spent in doing so wouldn't appear in *her* time



(the time inside the story) at all.

This is not a perfect illustration, of course. But it may give just a glimpse of what I believe to be the truth. God is not hurried along in the Time-stream of this universe any more than an author is hurried along in the imaginary time of his own novel. He has infinite attention to spare for each one of us. He doesn't have to deal with us in the mass. You are as much alone with Him as if you were the only being He had ever created. When Christ died, He died for *you* individually just as much as if you had been the only man in the world.

The way in which my illustration breaks down is this. In it the author gets out of one Time-series (that of the novel) only by going into another Time-series (the real one). But God, I believe, does not live in a Time-series at all. His life is not dribbled out moment by moment like ours: with Him it is, so to speak, still 1920 and already 1950.

If you picture Time as a straight line along which we have to travel, then you must picture God as the whole page on which the line is drawn. We come to the parts of the line one by one: we have to leave A behind before we get to B, and can't reach C till we leave B behind. God, from above or outside or all round, contains the whole line, and sees it all.

The idea is worth trying to grasp because it removes some apparent difficulties in Christianity. Before I became a Christian one of my objections was as follows. The Christians said that the eternal God who is everywhere and keeps the whole universe going, once became a human being. Well then, said I, how did the whole universe keep going while He

was a baby, or while He was asleep? How could He at the same time be God who knows everything and also a man asking his disciples ‘Who touched me?’ You see the sting lay in the time words: ‘*While* He was a baby’—‘How could He *at the same time*?’ In other words I was assuming that Christ’s life as God was in time, and that His life as the man Jesus in Palestine was a shorter period taken out of that time—just as my service in the army was a shorter period taken out of my total life. And that is how most of us perhaps tend to think about it. We picture God living through a period when His human life was still in the future: then coming to a period when it was present: then going on to a period when He could look back on it as something in the past. But probably these ideas correspond to nothing in the actual facts. You cannot fit Christ’s earthly life in Palestine into any time-relations with His life as God beyond all space and time. It is really (I suggest) a timeless truth about God that human nature, and the human experience of weakness and sleep and ignorance, are somehow included in His whole divine life. This human life in God is *from our point of view* a particular period in the history of our world (from the year one A.D. till the Crucifixion). We therefore imagine it is also a period in the history of God’s own existence. But God has no history. He is too completely and utterly *real* to have one. For, of course, to have a history means losing part of your reality (because it’s already slipped away into the past) and not yet having another part (because it is still in the future): in fact having nothing but the tiny little present, which has gone before you can speak about it. God forbid we should think God was like that! Even we may hope not to be always rationed in that way.

Another difficulty we get if we believe God to be in time is this. Everyone who believes in God at all believes that He knows

what you and I are going to do tomorrow. But if He knows I'm going to do so-and-so, how can I be free to do otherwise? 23

Well, here once again, the difficulty comes from thinking that God is progressing along the Time-line like us: the only difference being that He can see ahead and we can't. Well if that were true, if God *foresaw* our acts, it would be very hard to understand how we could be free not to do them. But suppose God is outside and above the Time-line. In that case, what we call 'to-morrow' is visible to Him *in just the same way* as what we call 'to-day'. All the days are 'Now' for Him. He doesn't *remember* you doing things yesterday; He simply *sees* you doing them, because, though you've lost yesterday, He has not. He doesn't *foresee* you doing things to-morrow; He simply *sees* you doing them: because, though to-morrow is not yet there for you, it is for Him. You never supposed that your actions at this moment were any less free because God knows what you are doing. Well, He knows your to-morrow's actions in just the same way—because He is already in to-morrow and can simply watch you. In a sense, He doesn't know your action till you've done it: but then the moment at which you have done it is already 'Now' for Him.

This idea has helped me a lot. If it doesn't help you, leave it alone. It is a 'Christian idea' in the sense that great and wise Christians have held it and there is nothing in it contrary to Christianity. But it is not in the Bible or any of the creeds. You can be a perfectly good Christian without accepting it, or indeed without thinking of the matter at all.

## IV

# GOOD INFECTION

I want to begin to-night by asking you to get a certain picture clear in your minds. Imagine two books lying on a table one on top of the other. Obviously the bottom book is keeping the other one up—supporting it. It's because of the underneath book that the top one is resting say two inches from the surface of the table instead of being *on* the table. Let's call the underneath book A and the top one B. The position of A is causing the position of B. Got it? Now let's imagine—it couldn't really happen, of course, but it will do for an illustration—let's imagine that both books have been in that position for ever and ever. In that case B's position would always have been resulting from A's position. But all the same, A's position would not have existed before B's position. In other words the result doesn't come *after* the cause. Of course results usually do: you eat the cucumber first and have the indigestion afterwards. But it's not so with all causes, and results. You'll see in a moment why I think this important.

24

I said a few pages back that God is a Being which contains three Persons while remaining one Being, just as a cube contains six squares while remaining one body. But as soon as I begin trying to explain how these Persons are connected I have to use words which make it sound as if one of them was there before the others. The First Person is called the Father and the Second the Son. We say that the First begets or produces the second; we call it *begetting*, not *making*, because what He produces is of

the same kind as Himself. In that way the word Father is the only word to use. But unfortunately it suggests that He's there first—just as a human father exists before his son. But that isn't so. There's no before and after about it. And that's why I've spent some time trying to make clear how one thing can be the source, or cause, or origin, of another without being there before it. The Son exists because the Father exists; but there never was a time before the Father produced the Son.

Perhaps the best way to think of it is this. I asked you just now to imagine those two books, and probably most of you did. That is, you made an act of imagination and as a result you had a mental picture. Quite obviously your act of imagining was the cause and the mental picture the result. But that doesn't mean that you first did the imagining and *then* got the picture. The moment you did it, the picture was there. Your will was keeping the picture before you all the time. Yet that act of will and the picture began at exactly the same moment and ended at the same moment. If there were a Being who had always existed and had always been imagining one thing, his act would always have been producing a mental picture; but the picture would be just as eternal as the act.

25

In the same way we must think of the Son always, so to speak, streaming forth from the Father, like light from a lamp, or heat from a fire, or thoughts from a mind. He is the self-expression of the Father—what the Father has to say. And there never was a time when He wasn't saying it. But have you noticed what's happening? All these pictures of light or heat are making it sound as if the Father and Son were two *things* instead of two Persons. So that after all, the New Testament picture of a Father and a Son turns out to be much more accurate than anything we

try to substitute for it. That's what always happens when you go away from the words of the Bible. It's quite right to go away from them for a moment in order to make some special point clear. But you've always got to go back. Naturally God knows how to describe Himself much better than we know how to describe Him. He knows that Father-and-Son is more like the relation between the First and Second Persons than anything else we can think of. Much the most important thing to know is that it's a relation of love. The Father delights in His Son; the Son looks up to His Father.

Before going on, notice the practical importance of this. All sorts of people are fond of repeating the Christian statement that 'God is love'. But they don't seem to notice that the words 'God is love' have no real meaning unless God contains at least two Persons. Love is something that one *person* has for another *person*. If God was a single person, then before the world was made, He was *not* love. Of course what these people mean when they say that God is love is often something quite different: they really mean *Love is God*. They really mean that our feelings of love, however and wherever they arise, and whatever results they produce, are to be treated with great respect. Perhaps they are: but that's something quite different from what Christians mean by the statement 'God is love.' They believe that the living, dynamic activity of love has been going on in God forever and has created everything else.

26

And that, by the way, is perhaps the most important difference between Christianity and all other religions—that in Christianity God is not a static *thing*—not even a person—but a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost, if you won't think me irreverent, a kind of dance. The union between

the Father and the Son is such a live concrete thing that this union itself is also a Person. I know that's almost inconceivable, but look at it this way. You know that among human beings, when they get together in a family, or a club, or a trades union, people talk about the 'spirit' of that family, or club, or trades union. They talk about its 'spirit' because the individual members, when they're together, do really develop particular ways of talking and behaving which they wouldn't have if they were apart. It is as if a sort of communal personality came into existence. Of course it isn't a real person: it is only rather like a person. But that's just one of the differences between God and us. What grows out of the joint life of the Father and Son is a *real* Person, is in fact the Third of the three Persons who are God.

This third Person is called, in technical language, the Holy Ghost or the 'spirit' of God. Don't be worried or surprised if you find it (or Him) rather vaguer or more shadowy in your mind than the other two. I think there's a reason why that must be so. In the Christian life you aren't usually looking *at* Him: He is always acting through you. If you think of the Father as something 'out there', in front of you, and of the Son as someone standing at your side, helping you to pray, trying to turn you into another son, then you have to think of the third Person as something inside you, or behind you. Perhaps some people might find it easier to begin with the third Person and work backwards. God is love, and that love works through men—especially through the whole community of Christians. But this spirit of love is, from all eternity, a love going on between the Father and the Son.

And now, what does it all matter? It matters more than anything

else in the world. The whole dance, or drama, or pattern of this three-Personal life is to be played out in each one of us: or (putting it the other way round) each one of us has got to enter that pattern, take his place in that dance. There is no other way to the happiness for which we were made. Good things as well as bad, you know, are caught by a kind of infection. If you want to get warm you must stand near the fire: if you want to be wet you must get into the water. If you want joy, power, peace, eternal life, you must get close to, or even into, the thing that has them. They're not a sort of *prizes* which God could, if He chose, just hand out to anyone. They are a great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up from the very centre of reality. If you are close to it, the spray will wet you: if you're not, you will remain dry. Once a man is united to God, how could he *not* live forever? Once a man is separated from God, what *can* he do but wither and die?

But how is he to be united to God? How is it possible for us to be taken into the three-Personal life?

You remember what I said a fortnight ago about *begetting* and *making*. We are not begotten by God, we're only made by Him: in our natural state we are not sons of God, only (so to speak) statues. We have not got Zoe or spiritual life: only Bios or biological life which is presently going to run down and die. Now the whole offer which Christianity makes is this: that we can, if we let God have His way, come to share in the life of Christ. If we do, we shall then be sharing a life which was begotten, not made, which always has existed and always will exist. Christ is the Son of God. If we share in this kind of life we also shall be sons of God. We shall love the Father as He does and the Holy Ghost will arise in us. He came to this



world and became a man in order to spread to other men the kind of life He has—by what I call ‘good infection’. Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply that: nothing else.

## V

# THE OBSTINATE TOY SOLDIERS

The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God. We don't know—anyway, *I* don't know—how things would have worked if the human race had never rebelled against God and joined the enemy. Perhaps every man would have been 'in Christ', would have shared the life of the Son of God, from the moment he was born. Perhaps the Bios or natural life would have been drawn up into the Zoë, the uncreated life, at once and as a matter of course. But that's guess-work. You and I are concerned with the way things work now.

And the present state of things is this. The two kinds of life are now not only different (they'd always have been that, I think) but actually opposed. The natural life in each of us is something self-centred, something that wants to be petted and admired, to take advantage of other lives, to exploit the whole universe. And specially it wants to be left to itself: to keep well away from anything better or stronger or higher than it, anything that might make it feel small. It's afraid of the light and air of the spiritual world, just as people who've been brought up to be dirty are afraid of a bath. And in a sense it's quite right. It knows that if the spiritual life gets hold of it, all its self-centredness and self-will are going to be killed and it's ready to fight tooth and nail to avoid *that*.

Did you ever think, when you were a child, what fun it would be if your toys could come to life? Well suppose you could really

have brought them to life. Imagine turning a tin soldier into a real little man. It would involve turning the tin into flesh. And suppose the tin soldier didn't like it. He's not interested in flesh; all he sees is that the tin is being spoiled. He thinks you're killing him. He'll do everything he can to prevent you. He *won't* be made into a man if he can help it.

Well, what you'd have done about that tin soldier I don't know. But what God did about us was this. The Second Person in God, the Son, became human Himself: was born into the world as an actual man—a real man of a particular height, with hair of a particular colour, speaking a particular language, weighing so many stone. The Eternal Being, who knows everything and who created the whole universe became not only a man but (before that) a baby, and before that a *foetus* inside a woman's body. If you want to get the hang of it, think how you'd like to become a slug or a crab.

The result of this was that you now had one man who really was what all men were intended to be: one man in whom the created life, derived from his mother, allowed itself to be completely and perfectly tuned into the begotten life. The natural human creature in Him was taken up fully into the divine Son. Thus in one instance humanity had, so to speak, arrived: had passed into the life of Christ. And because the whole difficulty for us is that the natural life has to be, in a sense 'killed', He chose an earthly career which involved the killing of His human desires at every turn—poverty, misunderstanding from His own family, betrayal by one of His intimate friends, being jeered at and manhandled by the Police, and execution by torture. And then, after being thus killed—killed every day, in a sense—the human creature in Him, because it was united to the divine Son,

came to life again. The Man in Christ rose again: not only the God. That's the whole point. For the first time we saw a *real* man. One tin soldier—*real* tin, just like the rest of us—had come fully and splendidly alive.

And here, of course, we come to the point where my illustration about the tin soldier breaks down. Because in the case of real toy soldiers or statues, if one came to life, of course that wouldn't make any difference to the rest. They are all separate. But human beings aren't. They *look* separate because you see them walking about separately. But then, we are so made that we can see only the present moment. If we could see the past, then of course it would look different. For there was a time when every man was part of his mother, and (earlier still) part of his father as well: and when they were part of his grandparents. So if you could see humanity spread out in time, as God sees it, it wouldn't look like a lot of separate things dotted about. It would look like one single growing thing—rather like a very complicated tree. Every individual would appear connected with every other. And not only that. Individuals aren't really separate from God any more than from one another. Every man, woman, and child all over the world is feeling and breathing at this moment only because God, so to speak, is 'keeping him going'.

Consequently, when Christ becomes man it isn't really as if you could become one particular tin soldier. It is as if something which is always affecting the whole human mass begins, at one point, to affect that whole human mass in a new way. From that point the effect spreads through all mankind. It makes a difference to people who lived before Christ as well as to people who lived after him. It makes a difference to people

who've never heard of him. It is like dropping into a glass of water one drop of something which gives a new taste or a new colour to the whole lot. But, of course, none of these illustrations really works perfectly. In the long run God is no one but Himself and what He does is like nothing else. You'd hardly expect it to be.

Now what is the difference which He has made to the whole human mass? It is just this; that the business of becoming a son of God, of being turned from a created thing into a begotten thing, of passing over from the temporary biological life into timeless 'spiritual' life, has been done for us. Humanity is already 'saved' in principle. We individuals have to appropriate that salvation. But the really tough work—the bit we couldn't have done for ourselves—has been done for us. We haven't got to try to climb up into spiritual life by our own efforts: it has already come down into the human race. If we will only lay ourselves open to the one Man in whom it was fully present, and who, in spite of being God, is also a real man, He will do it in us and for us. Remember what I said about 'good infection'. One of our own race has got this new life: if we get close to Him we shall catch it from Him. I won't say we're offered something for nothing: but we're offered something at very much less than cost price, and something we could never have paid for *at* cost price.

Of course, you can express this in all sorts of different ways. You can say that Christ died for our sins. You may say that the Father has forgiven us because Christ has done for us what we ought to have done. You may say that we are washed in the blood of the Lamb. You may say that Christ has defeated death. They're all true. If any of them don't appeal to you, leave it

alone and get on with the formula that does. And, whatever you do, don't start quarrelling with other people because they don't use the same formula as you do.

# VI

## TWO NOTES

In order to avoid misunderstanding I here add notes on two points arising out of the last talk.

1. One sensible critic wrote asking me why, if God wanted sons instead of ‘toy soldiers’, He didn’t *beget* many sons at the outset instead of first *making* toy soldiers and then bringing them to life by such a difficult and painful process. One part of the answer to this question is fairly easy: the other part is probably beyond all human knowledge. The easy part is this. The process of being turned from a creature into a son would not have been difficult or painful if the human race had not turned away from God centuries ago. They were able to do this because He gave them free will: He gave them free will because a world of mere automata could never love and therefore never know infinite happiness. The difficult part is this. All Christians are agreed that there is, in the full and original sense, only one ‘Son of God’. If we insist on asking ‘But could there have been many?’ we find ourselves in very deep water. Have the words ‘Could have been’ any sense at all when applied to God? You can say that one particular finite thing *could have been* different from what it is, because it would have been different if something else had been different, and the something else would have been different if some third thing had been different, and so on. (The letters on this page would have been red if the printer had used red ink, and he would have used red ink if he’d been instructed to, and so on.) But when you are talking about God—i.e. about

the rock bottom, irreducible Fact on which all other facts depend—it is nonsensical to ask if *it* could have been otherwise. It is what it is, and there's an end of the matter. But quite apart from this, I find a difficulty about the very idea of the Father begetting many sons from all eternity. In order to be many they would have to be somehow different from one another. Two pennies have the same shape. How are they two? By occupying different places and containing different atoms. In other words, to think of them as different, we have had to bring in space and matter; in fact we have had to bring in 'Nature' or the created universe. I can understand the distinction between the Father and the Son without bringing in space or matter, because the one begets and the other is begotten. The Father's relation to the Son is not the same as the Son's relation to the Father. But if there were several sons they would all be related to one another and to the Father in the same way. How would they differ from one another? One doesn't notice the difficulty at first, of course. One thinks one can form the idea of several 'sons'. But when I think closely, I find that the idea seemed possible only because I was vaguely imagining them as human forms standing about together in some kind of space. In other words, though I pretended to be thinking about something that exists before any universe was made, I was really smuggling in the picture of a universe and putting that something *inside* it. When I stop doing that and still try to think of the Father begetting many sons 'before all worlds' I find I am not really thinking of anything. The idea fades away into mere words. (Was Nature—space and time and matter—created precisely in order to make many-ness possible? Is there perhaps *no other way* of getting many eternal spirits except by first making many natural creatures, in a universe, and *then* spiritualising them? But of course all this is guess-work.)



2. The idea that the whole human race is, in a sense, one thing—one huge organism, like a tree—must not be confused with the idea that individual differences don't matter or that real people, Tom and Nobby and Kate, are somehow less important than collective things like classes, races, and so forth. Indeed the two ideas are opposites. Things which are parts of a single organism may be very different from one another: things which 34 aren't, may be very alike. Six pennies are quite separate and very alike: my nose and my lungs are very different but they are only alive at all because they are parts of my body and share its common life. Christianity thinks of human individuals not as mere members of a group or items in a list, but as organs in a body—different from one another and each contributing what no other could. When you find yourself wanting to turn your children, or pupils, or even your neighbours, into people exactly like yourself, remember that God probably never meant them to be that. You and they are different organs, intended to do different things. On the other hand, when you are tempted not to bother about someone else's troubles because they are 'no business of yours', remember that though he is different from you he is part of the same great organism as you. If you forget that he belongs to the same organism as yourself you will become an Individualist. If you forget that he is a different organ from you, if you want to suppress differences and make people all alike, you will become a Totalitarian. But a Christian must not be *either* a Totalitarian *or* an Individualist.

I feel a strong desire to tell you—and I expect you feel a strong desire to tell me—which of these two errors is the worse. That is the devil getting at us. He always sends errors into the world in pairs—pairs of opposites. And he always encourages us to spend a lot of time thinking which is the worse. You see why, of

course? He relies on your extra dislike of the one error to draw you gradually into the opposite one. But don't let us be fooled. We've got to keep our eyes on the goal and go bang through between both errors. We have no other concern than that with either of them.

## VII

# LET'S PRETEND

May I once again start by putting two pictures, or two stories rather, into your minds? One is the story you've all read called *Beauty and the Beast*. The girl, you remember, had to marry a monster for some reason. And she did. She kissed it as if it were a man. And then, much to her relief, it really turned into a man and all went well. The other story is about someone who had to wear a mask; a mask which made him look much nicer than he really was. He had to wear it for years. And when he took it off he found his own face had grown to fit it. He was now really beautiful. What had begun as disguise had become a reality. I think both these stories may, in a fanciful way, of course, help to illustrate what I've got to talk about to-night. Up till now, I've been trying to describe facts—what God is and what He has done. Now I want to talk about practice—what do we do next? What difference does all this theology make? Well, it can start making a difference to-night. If you're interested enough to listen to these talks, you're probably interested enough to make a shot at saying your prayers: and, whatever else you say, you'll probably say the Lord's Prayer.

Its very first words are *Our Father*. Do you now see what those words mean? They mean quite frankly, that you're putting yourself in the place of a *son* of God. To put it bluntly, you're *dressing up as Christ*. If you like, you're pretending. Because, of course, the moment you realise what the words mean, you realise that you're *not* a son of God. You're not a being like *the*

Son of God, whose will and interests are at one with those of the Father: you are a bundle of self-centred fears, hopes, greeds, jealousies, and self-conceit, all doomed to death. So that, in a way, this dressing up as Christ is a piece of outrageous cheek. But the odd thing is that He has ordered us to do it.

36

Why? What's the good of pretending to be what you aren't? Well, even on the human level, you know, there are two kinds of pretending. There's a bad kind, where the pretence is there *instead of* the real thing; as when a man pretends he's going to help you instead of really helping you. But there's also a good kind, where the pretence *leads up to* the real thing. When you're not feeling particularly friendly but know you ought to be, the best thing you can do, very often, is to put on a friendly manner and behave as if you were a nicer chap than you actually are. And, in a few minutes, as we've all noticed, you will be *really* feeling friendlier than you were. Very often the only way to get a quality in reality is to start behaving as if you had it already. That's why children's games are so important. They're always pretending to be grown-ups—playing soldiers, playing shop. But all the time, they are hardening their muscles and sharpening their wits, so that the pretence of being grown-up helps them to grow up in earnest.

Now, the moment you realise 'Here I am, dressing up as Christ', I don't mind betting you'll see at once some way in which *at that very moment* the pretence could be made less of a pretence and more of a reality. You'll find several things going on in your mind which wouldn't be going on there if you were really a son of God. Well, stop them. Or you may realise that, instead of saying your prayers, you ought to be downstairs writing a letter, or helping your wife to wash-up. Well, go and do it.

You see what's happening. *The Christ Himself*, the Son of God who is man (just like you) and God (just like His Father) is actually at your side and is already at that moment beginning to turn your pretence into a reality. This isn't just a fancy way of saying that your conscience is telling you what to do. If you simply ask your conscience, you get one result: if you remember that you're dressing up as Christ, you get a different one. There are lots of things which your conscience mightn't call definitely wrong (specially things in your mind) but which you'll see at once you can't go on doing if you are seriously trying to be like Christ. For you're not now thinking simply about right and wrong; you're trying to catch the good infection from a Person. It's more like painting a portrait than like obeying a set of rules. And the odd thing is that while in one way it's much harder than keeping rules, in another way it's far easier.

The real Son of God is at your side. He is beginning to turn you into the same kind of thing as Himself. He is beginning, so to speak, to 'inject' His kind of life and thought, His *Zoe*, into you; beginning to turn the tin soldier into a live man. The part of you that doesn't like it is the part that is still tin.

Some of you may feel that this is very unlike your own experience. You may say 'I've never had the sense of being helped by an invisible Christ, but I often *have* been helped by other human beings'. Now that's rather like the woman in the last war who said that if there were a bread shortage it wouldn't bother her house because they always ate toast. If there's no bread there'll be no toast. If there were no help from Christ, there'd be no help from other human beings. He works on us in all sorts of ways: not only through what we think our 'religious

life'. He works through Nature, through our own bodies, through books, sometimes through experiences which seem (at the time) *anti*-Christian. When a young chap who's been going to church in a routine way honestly realises that he doesn't believe in Christianity and stops going—provided he does it for honesty's sake and not just to annoy his parents—the spirit of Christ is probably nearer to him *then* than it ever was before. But above all, He works on us through each other.

Men are mirrors, or 'carriers' of Christ to other men. Sometimes unconscious carriers. This 'good infection' can be carried by those who haven't got it themselves. People who weren't Christians themselves helped me to Christianity. But usually it's those who know Him that bring Him to others. That's why the Church, the whole body of Christians showing Him to one another, is so important. You might say that when two Christians are following Christ together there's not twice as much Christianity as when they're apart, but sixteen times as much.

38

But don't forget this. At first it's natural for a baby to take its mother's milk without knowing its mother. It's equally natural for us to see the man who helps us without seeing Christ behind him. But we mustn't remain babies. We must go on to recognise the real Giver. It's madness not to. Because, if we don't, we shall be *relying* on human beings. And that's going to let us down. The best of them will make mistakes; all of them will die. We must be thankful to all the people who've helped us, we must honour them and love them. But never, never pin your whole faith on any human being: not if he's the best and wisest in the whole world. There are lots of nice things you can do with sand; but don't you try building a house on it.

And now we begin to see what it is that the New Testament is always talking about. It talks about Christians ‘being born again’; it talks about them ‘putting on Christ’; about Christ ‘being formed in us’; about our coming to ‘have the mind of Christ’.

Put right out of your head the idea that these are only fancy ways of saying that Christians are to read what Christ said and try to carry it out—as a man may read what Plato or Marx said and try to carry it out. They mean something much more than that. They mean that a real Person, Christ, here and now, in that very room where you’re saying your prayers, is doing things to you. It’s not a question of a good man who died two thousand years ago. It’s a living Man, still as much a man as you, and still as much God as He was when He created the world, really coming and interfering with your very self; killing the old natural self in you and replacing it with the kind of self He has. At first, only for moments. Then for longer periods. Finally, if all goes well, turning you permanently into a different sort of thing; into a new little Christ, a being which, in its own small way, has the same kind of life as God; which shares in His power, joy, knowledge and eternity. 39

And that reminds me of something which has been very misleading in my talk up to now. I’ve been talking as if it were *we* who did everything. In reality, of course, it is God who does everything. We, at most, allow it to be done to us. In a sense you might even say it is God who does the pretending. The Three-Personal God, so to speak, sees before Him *in fact* a self-centred greedy, grumbling, rebellious human animal. But He says ‘Let us pretend that this is not a mere creature, but our Son. It is like Christ in so far as it is a Man, for He became Man. Let

us pretend that it is also like Him in Spirit. Let us treat it as if it were what in fact it is not. Let us pretend in order to make the pretence into a reality'. God looks at you as if you were a little Christ: Christ stands beside you to turn you into one. I daresay this idea of a divine make-believe sounds rather strange at first. But, is it so strange really? Isn't that how the higher thing always raises the lower? A mother teaches her baby to talk by talking to it as if it understood long before it really does. We treat our dogs as if they were 'almost human': that's why they really become 'almost human' in the end.



## VIII

# IS CHRISTIANITY HARD OR EASY?

Last week I was talking about the Christian idea of ‘putting on Christ’, or first ‘dressing up’ as a son of God in order that you may finally become a real son. What I want to make clear tonight is that this isn’t *one* of the jobs a Christian has to do; and it isn’t a sort of special exercise for the top class. It is the whole of Christianity. Christianity offers nothing else at all. And I’d like to point out how it differs from ordinary ideas of ‘morality’ and ‘being good’.

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The ordinary idea which we all have before we become Christians is this. We take as starting point our ordinary self with its various desires and interests. We then admit that something else—call it ‘morality’ or ‘decent behaviour’, or ‘the good of society’—has claims on this self: claims which interfere with its own desires. What we mean by ‘being good’ is giving in to those claims. Some of the things the ordinary self wanted to do turn out to be what we call ‘wrong’: well, we must give them up. Other things, which the self did not want to do, turn out to be what we call ‘right’: well, we’ll have to do them. But we’re hoping all the time that when all the demands have been met, the poor natural self will still have some chance, and some time, to get on with its own life and do what it likes. In fact, we’re very like an honest man paying his taxes. He pays them all right, but he does hope that there’ll be enough left over for him to live on. Because we’re still taking our natural self as the starting point.

As long as we're thinking that way, one or other of two results is likely to follow. Either we give up trying to be good, or else we become very unhappy indeed. For, make no mistake: if you are really going to try to meet all the demands made on the natural self, it will *not* have enough left over to live on. The more you obey your conscience, the more your conscience will demand of you. And your natural self, which is thus being starved and hampered and worried at every turn, will get angrier and angrier. In the end, you'll either give up trying to be good, or else become one of those people who, as they say, 'live for others' but always in a discontented, grumbling way—always wondering why the others don't notice it more and always making a martyr of yourself. And once you've become that you'll be a far greater pest to anyone who has to live with you than you would have been if you'd remained frankly selfish.

The Christian way is different: harder, and easier. Christ says, 'Give me *all*. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want *you*. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you *myself*: my own will shall become yours'.

Both harder and easier than what we're all trying to do. You've noticed I expect that Christ Himself sometimes describes the Christian way as very hard, sometimes as very easy. He says,

‘Take up your Cross’—in other words, it’s like going to be beaten to death in a Concentration Camp. Next minute he says, ‘My yoke is easy and my burden light’. He means both. And one can just see why both are true.

Teachers will tell you that the laziest boy in the class is the one who works hardest in the end. They mean this. If you give two boys, say, a proposition in geometry to do, the one who is prepared to take trouble will try to understand it. The lazy boy will try to learn it by heart because, for the moment, that needs less effort. But six months later, when they’re preparing for an exam, that lazy boy is doing hours and hours of miserable drudgery over things the other boy understands, and positively enjoys, in a few minutes. Laziness means more work in the long run. Or look at it this way. In a battle, or in mountain climbing, there’s often one thing which it takes a lot of pluck to do; but it’s also, in the long run, the safest thing to do. If you funk it, you’ll find yourself, hours later, in far worse danger. The cowardly thing is also the most dangerous thing.

Well, it’s just like that here. The terrible thing, the almost impossible thing, is to hand over your whole self—all your wishes and precautions—to Christ. But it’s far easier than what we’re all trying to do instead. For what we’re trying to do is to remain what we call ‘ourselves’, to keep personal happiness as our great aim in life, and yet at the same time be ‘good’. We’re all trying to let our mind and heart go their own way—centred on money or pleasure or ambition—and hoping, in spite of this, to behave honestly and chastely and humbly. And that is exactly what Christ warned us you couldn’t do. As He said, a thistle can’t produce figs. If I’m a field that contains nothing but grass-seed, I can’t produce wheat. Cutting the grass

may keep it short: but I shall still produce grass and no wheat. If I want to produce wheat, the change must go deeper than the surface. I must be ploughed up and re-sown.

That's why the real problem of the Christian life comes where people don't usually look for it. It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning is just shoving them all back; just listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in. And so on, all day. Standing back from all your natural fussings and frettings; coming in out of the wind.

We can only do it for moments at first. But from those moments the new sort of life will be spreading through our system: because now we are letting Him work at the right part of us. It's the difference between paint, which is merely laid on the surface, and a dye or stain which soaks right through. He never talked vague, idealistic gas. When He said, 'Be perfect', He meant it. He meant that we must go in for the full treatment. It's hard; but the sort of compromise we're all hankering after is harder—in fact, it's impossible. It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We're like eggs at present. And you can't go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad.

May I come back to what I said before? This is the whole of Christianity. There is nothing else. It's so easy to get muddled about that. It's easy to think that the Church has a lot of different objects—education, building, missions, holding services. Just as

it's easy to think the State has a lot of different objects—military, political, economic, and what not. But in a way things are much simpler than that. The State exists simply to promote and to protect the ordinary happiness of human beings in this life. A husband and wife chatting over a fire, a couple of friends having a game of darts in a pub, a man reading a book in his own room or digging in his own garden—that is what the State is there for. And unless they are helping to increase and prolong and protect such moments all the laws, parliaments, armies, courts, police, economics etc. are simply a waste of time. In the same way the Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they're not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose. It's even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose. It says in the Bible that the whole universe was made *for* Christ and that everything is to be gathered together in Him. I don't suppose any of us can understand how this will happen as regards the whole universe. We don't know what (if anything) lives in the parts of it that are millions of miles away from this Earth. Even on this Earth we don't know how it applies to things other than men. After all, that's what you'd expect. We've been shown the plan only in so far as it concerns *us*.

I sometimes like to imagine that I can just see how it might apply to other things. I think I can see how the higher animals are in a sense drawn into Man when he loves them and makes them (as he does) much more nearly human than they would otherwise be. I can even see a sense in which the dead things and plants are drawn into Man as he studies them and uses and appreciates them. And if there were intelligent

creatures in other worlds they might do the same with their worlds. It might be that when intelligent creatures entered into Christ they would, in that way, bring all the other things in along with them. But I don't know: it's only a guess.

What we have been told is how *we* can be drawn into Christ—can become part of that wonderful present which the young Prince of the universe wants to offer to His Father—that present which is Himself and therefore us *in* Him. It is the only thing we were made for. And there are strange, exciting hints in the Bible that when *we* are drawn in, a great many other things in Nature will begin to come right. The bad dream will be over: it will be *morning*.

# IX

## COUNTING THE COST

I find a good many people have been bothered by what I said in the preceding talk about Our Lord's words, 'Be ye perfect'. Some people seem to think this means 'Unless you are perfect I will not help you'; and as we cannot be perfect, then, if He meant that, our position is hopeless. But I do not think He did mean that. I think He meant 'The only help I will give is help to become perfect. You may want something less: but I will give you nothing less'.

Let me explain. When I was a child I often had tooth-ache, and I knew that if I went to my mother she would give me something which would deaden the pain for that night and let me get to sleep. But I didn't go to my mother—at least, not till the pain became very bad. And the reason I didn't go was this. I didn't doubt she'd give me the aspirin; but I knew she'd also do something else. I knew she'd take me to the dentist next morning. In fact I couldn't get what I wanted out of her without getting something *more*, which I didn't want. I wanted immediate relief from pain: but I couldn't get it without having my teeth set permanently right. And I knew these dentists; I knew they started fiddling about with all sorts of other teeth which hadn't yet begun to ache. They wouldn't let sleeping dogs lie; if you gave them an inch they took an ell.

Now, if I may put it that way, Our Lord is like the dentists. If you give Him an inch, He will take an ell. Dozens of people go to

Him to be cured of some one particular sin which they are ashamed of (like masturbation or physical cowardice) or which is obviously spoiling daily life (like bad temper or drunkenness). Well, He will cure it all right: but He won't stop there. That may be all you asked; but if once call Him in, He will give you the full treatment.

That is why He warned people to 'count the cost' before becoming Christians. 'Make no mistake,' He says, 'If you let me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in My hands, that is what you are in for. Nothing less, or other, than that. You have free will, and if you choose, you can push Me away. But if you do not push Me away, understand that I am going to see this job through. Whatever suffering it may cost you in your earthly life, whatever inconceivable purification it may cost you after death, whatever it costs Me, I will never rest, nor let you rest, until you are literally perfect—until my Father can say without reservation that He is well pleased with you, as He said He was well pleased with me. This I can do and will do. But I will not do anything less.'

And yet—this is the other and equally important side of it—this Helper who will, in the long run, be satisfied with nothing less than absolute perfection, will also be delighted with the first feeble, stumbling effort you make to-morrow to do the simplest duty. As a great Christian writer (George Macdonald) pointed out, every father is *pleased* at the baby's first attempt to walk: no father would be *satisfied* with anything less than a firm, free, manly walk in a grown-up son. In the same way, he said, 'God is easy to please but hard to satisfy'.

The practical upshot is this. On the one hand God's demand for



perfection need not discourage you in the least in your present attempts to be good, or even in your present failures. Each time you fall He will pick you up again. And He knows perfectly well that your own efforts are never going to bring you anywhere near perfection. On the other hand, you must realise from the outset that the goal towards which He is beginning to guide you is absolute perfection; and no power in the whole universe, except you yourself, can prevent Him from taking you to that goal. That is what you're in for. And it is very important to realise that. If we don't, then we are very likely to start pulling back and resisting Him after a certain point. I think that many of us, when Christ has enabled us to overcome one or two sins that were an obvious nuisance, are inclined to feel (though we don't put it into words) that we're now good enough. He's done all we wanted Him to do, and we'd be obliged if He would now leave us alone. As we say 'I never expected to be a saint, I only wanted to be a decent ordinary chap'. And we imagine when we say this that we are being humble.

But this is the fatal mistake. *Of course* we never wanted, and never asked, to be made into the sort of creatures He is going to make us into. But the question is not what we intended ourselves to be, but what He intended us to be when He made us. He is the inventor, we are only the machine. He is the painter, we are only the picture. How should *we* know what He means us to be like? You see, He has already made us something very different from what we were. Long ago, before we were born, when we were inside our mother's bodies, we passed through various stages. We were once rather like vegetables, and once rather like fish; only at a later stage did we become like human babies. And if we had been conscious at those earlier stages, I daresay we should have been quite contented to stay as

vegetables or fish—shouldn't have wanted to be made into babies. But all the time He knew His plan for us and was determined to carry it out. Something the same is now happening at a higher level. We may be content to remain what we call 'ordinary people': but He is determined to carry out a quite different plan. To shrink back from that plan isn't humility; it is laziness and cowardice. To submit to it isn't conceit or megalomania; it is obedience.

Here is another way of putting the two sides of the truth. On the one hand we must never imagine that our own unaided efforts can be relied on to carry us even through the next twenty-four hours as 'decent' people. If He doesn't support us, not one of us is safe from some gross sin. On the other hand, no possible degree of holiness or heroism which has ever been recorded of the greatest saints is beyond what He is determined to produce in every one of us in the end. The job will not be completed in this life: but He means to get us *as far as possible* before death.

That is why we must not be surprised if we are in for a rough time. When a man turns to Christ and seems to be getting on pretty well (in the sense that some of his bad habits are now corrected), he often feels that it would now be natural if things went fairly smoothly. When troubles come along—illnesses, money troubles, new kinds of temptation—he is disappointed. Those things, he feels, might have been necessary to rouse him and make him repent in his bad old days; but why *now*? Because God is forcing him on, or up, to a higher level: putting him into situations where he will have to be very much braver, or more patient, or more loving, than he ever dreamed of being before. It seems to us all unnecessary: but that is because we haven't yet had the slightest notion of the tremendous thing He means to

make of us.

I find I must borrow yet another parable from George Macdonald. Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to re-build that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He's doing. He's getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and which doesn't seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a *palace*. He intends to come and live in it Himself.

The command *Be ye perfect* is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that *can* obey that command. He said (in the Bible) that we were 'gods' and He is going to make good His words. If we let Him—for we *can* prevent Him, if we choose—He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God *perfectly* (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said.

# X

## NICE PEOPLE OR NEW MEN

He meant what He said. Those who put themselves in His hands will become perfect, as He is perfect—perfect in love, wisdom, joy, beauty, and immortality. The change will not be completed in this life, for death is an important part of the treatment. How far the change will have gone before death in any particular Christian is uncertain. 49

I think this is the right moment to consider a question which is often asked: if Christianity is true why aren't all Christians obviously nicer than all non-Christians? What lies behind that question is partly something very reasonable and partly something that is not reasonable at all. The reasonable part is this. If conversion to Christianity makes no improvement in a man's outward actions—if his continues to be just as snobbish or spiteful or envious or ambitious as he was before—then I think we must suspect that his 'conversion' was largely imaginary; and after one's original conversion, every time one thinks one has made an advance, that is the test to apply. Fine feelings, new insights, greater interest in 'religion' mean nothing unless they make our actual behaviour better; just as in an illness 'feeling better' isn't much good if the thermometer shows that your temperature is still going up. In that sense the outer world is quite right to judge Christianity by its results. Christ told us to judge by results. A tree is known by its fruit; or, as we say, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. When we Christians behave badly, or fail to behave well, we are making

Christianity unbelievable to the outside world. The posters tell us that Careless Talk costs Lives. It is equally true that Careless Lives cost Talk. Our careless lives set the outer world talking; and we give them grounds for talking in a way that throws doubt on the truth of Christianity itself.

But there is another way of demanding results in which the outer world may be quite illogical. They may demand not merely that each man's life should improve if he becomes a Christian: they may also demand before they believe in Christianity that they should see the whole world neatly divided into two camps—Christian and non-Christian—and that all the people in the first camp at any given moment should be obviously nicer than all the people in the second. This is unreasonable on several grounds. 50

(1) In the first place the situation in the actual world is much more complicated than that. The world doesn't consist of 100 per cent Christians and 100 per cent non-Christians. There are people (a great many of them) who are slowly ceasing to be Christians but who still call themselves by that name: some of them are clergymen. There are other people who are slowly becoming Christians though they do not yet call themselves so. There are people who do not accept the full Christian doctrine about Christ but who are so strongly attracted by Him that they are His in a much deeper sense than they themselves understand. There are people in other religions who are being led by God's secret influence to concentrate on those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity, and who thus belong to Christ without knowing it. For example, a Buddhist of good will may be led to concentrate more and more on the Buddhist teaching about mercy and to leave in the background (though he

might still *say* he believed) the Buddhist teaching on certain other points. Many of the good Pagans long before Christ's birth may have been in this position. And always, of course, there are a great many people who are just confused in mind and have a lot of inconsistent beliefs all jumbled up together. Consequently, it is not much use trying to make judgements about Christians and non-Christians *in the mass*. It is some use comparing cats and dogs, or even men and women, in the mass, because there one knows definitely which is which. Also, an animal doesn't turn (either slowly or suddenly) from a dog into a cat. But when we are comparing Christians in general with non-Christians in general, we are usually not thinking about real people whom we know at all, but only about two vague ideas which we've got from novels and newspapers. If you want to compare the bad Christian and the good Atheist, you must think about two real specimens whom you have actually met. Unless we come down to brass tacks in that way, we shall only be wasting time.

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(2) Suppose we have come down to brass-tacks and are now talking not about an imaginary Christian and an imaginary non-Christian, but about two real people in our own neighbourhood. Even then we must be careful to ask the right question. If Christianity is true then it ought to follow (a) That any Christian will be nicer than the same person would be if he were not a Christian, (b) That any man who becomes a Christian will be nicer than he was before. Just in the same way, if the advertisements of Whitesmile's toothpaste are true it ought to follow (a) That anyone who uses it will have better teeth than the same person would have if he did not use it. (b) That if anyone begins to use it his teeth will improve. But to point out that I, who use Whitesmile's (and also have inherited bad teeth

from both my parents) haven't got as fine a set as some healthy young negro who never used any toothpaste at all, does not, by itself, prove that the advertisements are untrue. Christian Miss Bates may have an unkind tongue than unbelieving Dick Firkin. That, by itself, does not tell us whether Christianity works. The question is what Miss Bates's tongue would be like if she weren't a Christian and what Dick's would be like if he became one. Miss Bates and Dick, as a result of natural causes and early upbringing, have certain temperaments: Christianity professes to put both temperaments under new management if they will allow it to do so. What you have a right to ask is whether that management, if allowed to take over, improves the concern. Everyone knows that *what is being managed* in Dick Firkin's case is much 'nicer' than *what is being managed* in Miss Bates's. That is not the point. To judge the management of a factory, you must consider not only the output but the plant. Considering the plant at Factory A it may be a wonder that it turns out anything at all; considering the first class outfit at Factory B its output, though high, may be a great deal lower than it ought to be. No doubt the good manager at Factory A is going to put in new machinery as soon as he can, but that takes time. In the meantime low output doesn't prove that he is a failure.

(3) And now, let us go a little deeper. The manager is going to put in new machinery: before Christ has finished with Miss Bates she is going to be very 'nice' indeed. But if we left it at that, it would sound as though Christ's only aim was to pull Miss Bates up to the same level on which Dick had been all along. We have been talking, in fact, as if Dick were all right; as if Christianity was something nasty people needed and nice ones could afford to do without; and as if niceness was all that God

demanded. But this would be a fatal mistake. The truth is that in God's eyes Dick Firkin needs 'saving' every bit as much as Miss Bates. In one sense (I'll explain *what* sense in a moment) niceness hardly comes into the question.

You cannot expect God to look at Dick's placid temper and friendly disposition exactly as we do. They result from natural causes which God Himself creates. Being merely temperamental, they will all disappear if Dick's digestion alters. The niceness, in fact, is God's gift to Dick, not Dick's gift to God. In the same way, God has allowed natural causes, working in a world spoiled by centuries of sin, to produce in Miss Bates the narrow mind and jangled nerves which account for most of her nastiness. He intends, in His own good time, to set that part of her right. But that is not, for God, the critical part of the business. It presents no difficulties. It is not what He is anxious about. What He is watching and waiting and working for is something that is not easy even for God, because, from the nature of the case, even He *cannot* produce it by a mere act of power. He is waiting and watching for it both in Miss Bates and in Dick Firkin. It is something they can freely give Him or freely refuse to Him. Will they, or will they not, turn to Him and thus fulfil the only purpose for which they were created? Their free will is trembling inside them like the needle of a compass. But this is a needle that can *choose*. It *can* point to its true North; but it needn't. Will the needle swing round, and settle, and point to God?

He can help it to do so. He can't force it. He can't, so to speak, put out His own hand and pull it into the right position, for then it wouldn't be free will any more. Will it point North? That is the question on which all hangs. Will Miss Bates and Dick offer



their natures to God? The question whether the natures they offer or withhold are, at that moment, nice or nasty ones, is of secondary importance. *He* can see to that part of the problem.

Don't misunderstand me. Of course God regards a nasty nature as a bad and deplorable thing. And of course He regards a nice nature as a good thing—good like bread, or sunshine, or water. But these are the good things *He* gives to *us*. He created Dick's sound nerves and good digestion, and there's plenty more where they came from. It costs God nothing, so far as we know, to *create nice things*: but to *convert rebellious wills* cost Him the crucifixion. And because they are wills they can—in nice people just as much as in nasty ones—refuse His request. And then, because that niceness in Dick was merely part of nature, it will all go to pieces in the end. Nature herself will all pass away. Natural causes come together in Dick to make a pleasant psychological pattern, just as they come together in a sunset to make a pleasant pattern of colours. Presently (for that is how nature works) they will fall apart again and the pattern in both cases will disappear. Dick has had the chance to turn (or rather, to allow God to turn) that momentary pattern into the beauty of an eternal spirit: and he hasn't taken it.

There is a paradox here. As long as Dick doesn't turn to God, he thinks his niceness is his own, and just as long as he thinks that, it isn't his own. It is when Dick realises that his niceness is not his own but a gift from God, and when he offers it back to God—it is just then that it begins to be really his own. For now Dick is beginning to take a share in his own creation. The only things we can *keep* are the things we freely give to God. What we try to keep for ourselves is just what we are sure to lose.

We must therefore not be surprised if we find among the Christians some people who are still nasty. There is even, when you come to think it over, a reason why nasty people might be expected to turn to Christ in greater numbers than nice ones. That was what people objected to about Christ during His life on earth: He seemed to attract 'such awful people'. That is what people still object to, and always will. Do you not see why? Christ said 'Blessed are the poor' and 'How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom', and no doubt He primarily meant the economically rich and economically poor. But don't His words also apply to another kind of riches and poverty? One of the dangers of having a lot of money is that you may be quite satisfied with the kinds of happiness money can give and so fail to realise your need for God. If everything seems to come simply by signing cheques, you may forget that you are at every moment totally dependent on God. Now quite plainly, natural gifts carry with them a similar danger. If you have sound nerves and intelligence and health and popularity and a good upbringing, you are likely to be quite satisfied with your character as it is. 'Why drag God into it?' you may ask. A certain level of good conduct comes fairly easily to you. *You're* not one of those wretched creatures who are always being tripped up by sex, or dipsomania, or nervousness, or bad temper. Everyone says you are a nice chap and (between ourselves) you agree with them. You are quite likely to believe that all this niceness is your own doing: and you may easily not feel the need for any better kind of goodness. Often people who have all these natural kinds of goodness can't be brought to recognise their need for Christ at all until, one day, the natural goodness lets them down and their self-satisfaction is shattered. In other words, it is hard for those who are 'rich' in this sense to enter the Kingdom.

It is very different for the nasty people—the little, low, timid, warped, thin-blooded, lonely people, or the passionate, sensual, unbalanced people. If they make any attempt at goodness at all, they learn, in double quick time, that *they* need help! It's Christ or nothing for them. It's taking up the cross and following—or else despair. They are the lost sheep; He came specially to find them. They are (in one very real and terrible sense) the 'poor': He blessed them. They are the 'awful set' he goes about with—and of course the Pharisees say still, as they said from the first, 'If there were anything in Christianity those people wouldn't be Christians'.

There is either a warning or an encouragement here for every one of us. If you are a nice person—if virtue comes easily to you—beware! Much is expected from those to whom much is given. If you mistake for your own merits what are really God's gifts to you through nature, and if you are contented with simply being nice, you are still a rebel: and all those gifts will only make you fall more terrible, your corruption more complicated, your bad example more disastrous. The Devil was an archangel once; his natural gifts were as far above yours as yours are above those of a chimpanzee.

But if you are a poor creature—poisoned by a wretched upbringing in some house full of vulgar jealousies and senseless quarrels—saddled, by no choice of your own, with some loathsome sexual perversion—nagged day in and day out by an inferiority complex that makes you snap at your best friends—do not despair. He knows all about it. You are one of the poor whom He blessed. He knows what a wretched machine you are trying to drive. Keep on. Do what you can. One day (perhaps in another world, but perhaps far sooner than that) he will fling it

on the scrap-heap and give you a new one. And then you may astonish us all—not least yourself: for you’ve learned your driving in a hard school. (Some of the last will be first and some of the first will be last.)

‘Niceness’—wholesome, integrated personality—is an excellent thing. We must try by every medical, educational, economic, and political means in our power, to produce a world where as many people as possible grow up ‘nice’; just as we must try to produce a world where all have plenty to eat. But we mustn’t suppose that even if we succeeded in making everyone nice we should have saved their souls. A world of nice people, content in their own niceness, looking no further, turned away from God, would be just as desperately in need of salvation as a miserable world—and might even be more difficult to save.

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For mere improvement is not redemption, though redemption always improves people even here and now and will, in the end, improve them to a degree we cannot yet imagine. God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man. It is not like teaching a horse to jump better and better but like turning a horse into a winged creature. Of course, once it has got its wings, it will soar over fences which could never have been jumped and thus beat the natural horse at its own game. But there may be a period, while the wings are just beginning to grow, when it can’t do so: and at that stage the lumps on the shoulders—no one could tell by looking at them that they are going to be wings—may even give it an awkward appearance.

But perhaps we have already spent too long on this question. If

you *want* an argument against Christianity (and I well remember how eagerly I looked for such arguments when I began to be afraid it was true) you can easily find some stupid and unsatisfactory Christian and say, 'So there's your boasted new man! Give me the old kind'. But if once you have begun to see that Christianity is on other grounds probable, you will know in your heart that this is only evading the issue. What can you ever really know of other people's souls—of their temptations, their opportunities, their struggles? One soul in the whole creation you do know: and it is the only one whose fate is placed in your hands. If there is a God, you are, in a sense, *alone* with Him. You cannot put Him off with speculations about your next door neighbours or memories of what you have read in books. What will all that chatter and hearsay count (will you even be able to remember it?) when the anaesthetic fog which we call 'nature' or 'the real world' fades away and the Presence in which you have always stood becomes palpable, immediate, and unavoidable?

# XI

## THE NEW MEN

In the last talk I compared Christ's work of making New Men to the process of turning a horse into a winged creature. I used that extreme example in order to emphasise the point that it is not mere improvement but Transformation. The nearest parallel to it in the world of nature is to be found in the remarkable transformations we can make in insects by applying certain rays to them. Some people think this is how Evolution worked. The alterations in creatures on which it all depends may have been produced by rays coming from outer space. (Of course once the alterations are there, what they call 'Natural Selection' gets to work on them: i.e. the useful alterations survive and the other ones get weeded out.)

Perhaps a modern man can understand the Christian idea best if he takes it in connection with Evolution. Everyone now knows about Evolution (though, of course, some educated people disbelieve it): everyone has been told that man has evolved from lower types of life. Consequently, people often wonder 'What is the next step. When is the thing beyond man going to appear?' Imaginative writers try sometimes to picture this next step—the 'Superman' as they call him; but they usually only succeed in picturing someone a good deal nastier than man as we know him and then try to make up for that by sticking on extra legs or arms. But supposing the next step was to be something even more different from the earlier steps than they ever dreamed of? And isn't it very likely it would be?

Thousands of centuries ago huge, very heavily armoured creatures were evolved. If anyone had at that time been watching the course of Evolution he would probably have expected that it was going to go on to heavier and heavier armour. But he would have been wrong. The future had a card up its sleeve which nothing at that time would have led him to expect. It was going to spring on him little, naked, unarmoured animals which had better brains: and with those brains they were going to master the whole planet. They were not merely going to have more power than the prehistoric monsters, they were going to have a new *kind* of power. The next step was not only going to be different, but different with a new *kind* of difference. The stream of Evolution was not going to flow on in the direction in which he saw it flowing: it was in fact going to take a sharp bend.

Now it seems to me that most of the popular guesses at the Next Step are making just the same sort of mistake. People see (or at any rate they think they see) men developing greater brains and getting greater mastery over nature. And because they think the stream is flowing in that direction, they imagine it will *go on* flowing in that direction. But I can't help thinking that the Next Step will be *really* new; it will go off in a direction you could never have dreamed of. It would hardly be worth calling a New Step unless it did. I should expect not merely difference but a new kind of difference. I should expect not merely change but a new method of producing the change. Or, to make an Irish bull, I should expect the next stage in Evolution not to be a stage in Evolution at all: should expect that Evolution itself as a method of producing change, will be superseded. And finally, I shouldn't be surprised if, when the thing happened, very few people noticed that it was happening.

Now, if you care to talk in these terms, the Christian view is precisely that the Next Step has already appeared. And it is really new. It isn't a change from brainy men to brainier men: it is a change that goes off in a totally different direction—a change from being creatures of God to being sons of God. The first instance appeared in Palestine two thousands years ago. In a sense, the change isn't 'Evolution' at all, because it is not something arising out of the natural process of events but something coming into nature from outside. But that is what I should expect. We arrived at our idea of 'Evolution' from studying the past. If there are real novelties in store then *of course* our idea, based on the past, will not really cover them. And in fact this New Step differs from all previous ones not only in coming from outside nature but in several other ways as well.

(1) It is not carried on by sexual reproduction. Need we be surprised at that? There was a time before sex had appeared; development used to go on by different methods. Consequently, we might have expected that there would come a time when sex disappeared, or else (which is what is actually happening) a time when sex, though it continued to exist, ceased to be the main channel of development.

(2) At the earlier stages living organisms have had either no choice or very little choice about *taking* the new step. Progress was, in the main, something that happened to them, not something that they did. But the new step, the step from being creatures to being sons, is voluntary. At least, voluntary in one sense. It is not voluntary in the sense that we, of ourselves, could have chosen to take it or could even have imagined it; but it is voluntary in the sense that when it is offered to us we can



refuse it. We can, if we please, shrink back; we can dig in our heels and let the new Humanity go on without us.

(3) I have called Christ the ‘first instance’ of the new man. But of course He is something much more than that. He is not merely a new man, one specimen of the species, but *the* new man. He is the origin and centre and life of all the new men. He comes into the created universe, of His own will, bringing with Him the *Zoe*, the new life. (I mean new *to us*, of course: in its own place *Zoe* has existed for ever and ever.) And He transmits it not by heredity but by what I have called ‘good infection’. Everyone who gets it gets it by personal contact with Him. Other men become ‘new’ by being ‘in Him’.

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(4) This step is taken at a different speed from the previous ones. Compared with the development of man on this planet, the diffusion of Christianity over the human race seems to go like a flash of lightning—for two thousand years is almost nothing in the history of the universe. (Never forget that we are all still ‘the early Christians’. The present wicked and wasteful divisions between us are, let us hope, a disease of infancy: we are till teething. The outer world, no doubt, thinks just the opposite. It thinks we are dying of old age. But it has thought that so often before! Again and again it has thought Christianity was dying, dying by persecutions from without or corruptions from within, by the rise of Mohammedanism, the rise of the physical sciences, the rise of great anti-Christian revolutionary movements. But every time the world has been disappointed. Its first disappointment was over the crucifixion. The Man came to life again. In a sense—and I quite realise how frightfully unfair it must seem to them—that has been happening ever since. They keep on killing the thing that He started: and each time, just as

they're patting down the earth on its grave, they suddenly hear that it's still alive and has even broken out in some new place. No wonder they hate us.)

(5) The stakes are higher. By falling back at the earlier steps a creature lost, at the worst, its few years of life on this earth: very often it didn't lose even that. By falling back at this step we lose a prize which is (in the strictest sense of the word) 61 infinite. For now the critical moment has arrived. Century by century God has guided nature up to the point of producing creatures which can (if they will) be taken right *out* of nature, turned into 'gods'. Will they allow themselves to be taken? In a way, it is like the crisis of birth. Until we rise and follow Christ we are still parts of Nature, still in the womb of our great mother. Her pregnancy has been long and painful and anxious, but it has reached its climax. The great moment has come. Everything is ready. The Doctor has arrived. Will the birth 'go off all right'? But of course it differs from an ordinary birth in one important respect. In an ordinary birth the baby hasn't much choice: here it has. I wonder what an ordinary baby would do if it *had* the choice. It might prefer to stay in the dark and warmth and safety of the womb. For of course it would *think* the womb meant safety. That would be just where it was wrong; for if it stays there it will die.

Well, the thing has happened: the new step has been taken and is being taken. Already the new men are dotted here and there all over the earth. Some, as I admitted in the last talk, are still hardly recognisable: but others can be recognised. Every now and then one meets them. Their very voices and faces are different from ours; stronger, quieter, happier, more radiant. They begin where most of us leave off. They are, I say,

recognisable; but you must know what to look for. They will not be very like the idea of ‘religious people’ which you have formed from your general reading. They do not draw attention to themselves. You tend to think that you are being kind to them when they are really being kind to you. They love you more than other men do but they need you less. (We must get over wanting to be needed: in some goodish people, specially women, that is the hardest of all temptations to resist.) They will usually seem to have a lot of *time*: you will wonder where it comes from. When you have recognised one of them, you will recognise the next one much more easily. And I strongly suspect (but 62 how should I know?) that they recognise one another immediately and infallibly, across every barrier of colour, sex, class, age, and even of creeds. In that way, to become holy is rather like joining a secret society. To put it at the very lowest, it must be great *fun*.

But you mustn’t imagine that the new men are, in the ordinary sense, all alike. A good deal of what I’ve been saying in these talks might make you suppose that that was bound to be so. To become new men means losing what we now call ‘ourselves’. Out of ourselves, into Christ, we must go. His will is to become ours and we are to think His thoughts, to ‘have the mind of Christ’ as the Bible says. And if Christ is one, and if He is thus to be ‘in’ us all, shall we not all be exactly the same? It certainly sounds like it; but in fact it is not so.

It is difficult here to get a good illustration; because, of course, no other two things are related to each other just as the Creator is related to one of His creatures. But I will try two very imperfect illustrations which may give a hint of the truth. Imagine a lot of people who have always lived in the dark. You

come and try to describe to them what light is like. You might tell them that if they come into the light that same light would fall on them all and they would all reflect it and thus become what we call visible. Isn't it quite possible that they would imagine that, since they were all receiving the same light, and all reacting to it in the same way (i.e. all reflecting it), they would all look alike? Whereas you and I know that the light will in fact bring out, or show up, how different they are. Or again, suppose a person who knew nothing about salt. You give him a pinch to taste and he experiences a particular strong, sharp taste. You then tell him that in your country people use salt in all their cookery. Mightn't he reply 'In that case I suppose all your dishes taste exactly the same: because the taste of that stuff you've just given me is so strong that it will kill the taste of everything else'. But you and I know that the real effect of salt is exactly the opposite. So far from killing the taste of the egg and the tripe and the cabbage, it actually brings it out. They don't show their real taste till you've added the salt. (Of course, as I warned you, this is not really a very good illustration, because you *can* kill the other tastes by putting in too much salt, whereas you can't kill the taste of a human personality by putting in too much Christ. I'm doing the best I can.)

It is something like that with Christ and us. The more we get what we now call 'ourselves' out of the way and let Him take us over, the more truly ourselves we become. There is so much of Him that millions and millions of 'little Christs', all different, will still be too few to express Him fully. He made them all. He invented—as an author invents characters in a novel—all the different men that you and I were intended to be. In that sense our *real* selves are all waiting for us in Him. It is no good trying

to 'be myself' without Him. The more I resist Him and try to live on my own, the more I become dominated by my own heredity and upbringing and surroundings and natural desires. In fact what I so proudly call 'Myself' becomes merely the meeting place for trains of events which I never started and which I can't stop. What I call 'My wishes' become merely the desires thrown up by my physical organism or pumped into me by other men's thoughts or even suggested to me by devils. Eggs and alcohol and a good night's sleep will be the real origins of what I flatter myself by regarding as my own highly personal and discriminating decision to make love to the girl opposite to me in the railway carriage. Propaganda will be the real origin of what I regard as my own personal political ideals, I am not, in my natural state, nearly so much of a person as I like to believe: most of what I call 'me' can be very easily explained. It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own.

At the beginning I said there were Personalities in God. Well, I'll go further now. There are no real personalities anywhere else. Until you have given up your self to Him you will not have a real self. Sameness is to be found most among the most 'natural' men, not among those who surrender to Christ. How monotonously alike all the great tyrants and conquerors have been: how gloriously different are the saints.

But there must be a real giving up of the self. You must throw it away 'blindly' so to speak. Christ will *in fact* give you a real personality: but you mustn't go to Him for the sake of that. As long as your own personality is what you are bothering about you are not going to Him at all. The very first step is to try to forget about the self altogether. Your real, new self (which is

Christ's and also yours, and yours just because it is His) won't come as long as you're looking for it. It will come when you are looking for Him. Does that sound strange? The same principle holds, you know, for more everyday matters. Even in social life, you will never make a good impression on other people until you stop thinking about what sort of impression you are making. Even in literature and art, no man who bothers about originality will ever be original: whereas if you simply try to tell the truth (without caring twopence how often it's been told before) you will, nine times out of ten, become original without ever having noticed it. The principle runs through all life from top to bottom. Give up yourself, and you'll find your real self. Lose your life and you'll save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favourite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fibre of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep *nothing* back. Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.

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