What is the Meaning of Life?
Program 59
Jesus' Resurrection: Hallucinations
by Ernest O'Neill

I think we've all had the experience of being amazed at finding out how bright our fathers have turned out to be. You know how it is. There is that period of our lives somewhere around 13 years of age and it carries on until maybe 21 or sometimes unfortunately, until we are 25 or 26, when we think the dumbest people in the world must be our parents.

Then, after we begin to find out what life is about, we come right round to where we started. We started as children, thinking our father was the wisest man in the whole universe. It's amazing how often we come back to that; how often we come back to the place where we are amazed at how wise and how clever our fathers are.

So, we end up back where we started, surprised that we find truth and we find reality right in the place where we originally thought it to be, but where we began to suspect it wasn't. That's what I think a lot of us find out about modern problems today. We get all wrapped up in all kinds of theoretical issues.

Who am I? What is my identity? What is life about? How do I establish my own significance with the other significant authorities in my life? We can go on forever with these philosophical and psychological deep, conundrums that we pose to ourselves. But perhaps, the greatest one of all is: what are we involved in here?

What is the purpose of our lives? What is the meaning of our lives? Why are we here? The problem that all of us have in answering this question is that we are all just giving human

opinions. Even the great religious leaders are giving their opinion. Because nobody seems to have any experience outside the world itself by which they can establish and reinforce that what they say is actual reality.

That is, no one except one man. There is only one man who has shown he has come from outer space and has the power to go into outer space and return into the world whenever he chooses. That is a bit like what we found in our fathers. We find the answer is back where we used to think it was, but where we grew cynical about it in our adolescent years.

It's this man Jesus of Nazareth. He's the one we were taught when we were children was the son of the Creator of the world. It's back with him that we have to find any evidence of what is beyond the sky, what is beyond Saturn, Venus, and what is beyond the furthest spot that our satellites have reached.

Because this is the only man who has shown historically he was anything more than an ordinary human being. He has shown it, not only by the fact that he talked like the person who would be the son of the Supreme Being that lies behind the whole universe, not only because he acted like him, not only because he lived a life that even his enemies admitted was an absolutely perfect, sinless one; not only because he had the power over sickness and death that he showed when he raised people from the dead and healed lepers and blind men and deaf men; not only by the fact that he had power to still a storm on a lake, but, also, above everything else, because of this event that is connected with his death. Indeed, all of the evidence that this man was the son of God pales before the one event in his life that sets him apart from all other religious leaders and prophets.

He said throughout his public ministry that he would rise from the dead on the third day -- and he did. Many gurus have been

buried alive, and through controlled breathing have managed to survive in a kind of trance under the earth. But none have been executed by experts like the Romans and then actually risen from the dead.

That's what happened with this man. The soldiers were so sure that he was dead they didn't even bother breaking his legs. They simply thrust a spear into his side and a mixture of blood and water poured out.

Then, he was buried in a private tomb, bound tightly in grave clothes. A large stone was rolled across the mouth of the grave. On Sunday morning (he was buried on Friday night), he met Mary, one of his followers, in the garden. When she reported it to the other disciples, they wouldn't believe her.

But, in a moment, Jesus appeared suddenly in the room with them. He did this for the next month or more, appearing on more than a dozen occasions. Sometimes he appeared to a few of them, sometimes to more than 500 at one time. Sometimes he ate breakfast or allowed skeptical Thomas to poke his finger into the holes in his hands to make it clear that he was not a ghost or a psychological hallucination.

Then, he explained he must return to his Father, the Creator of the universe, and his body has never been found on earth since. All the hypothetical explanations of the resurrection are harder to believe than the facts themselves. The two vital facts are, the empty tomb, and the resurrection appearances.

The old arguments that Jesus just swooned on the cross and revived in the coolness of the tomb or that the disciples, or the Romans stole the body aren't even very logical.

How could a man whose side had been speared by the Roman experts as already dead have recovered from his wounds so completely that he could not only free himself from the grave clothes and roll away the stone, but could appear at a dozen different locations over the next month and appear not only revived, but more alive than he had ever been before? It just doesn't make sense.

If the Romans stole the body (that's another argument) why didn't they parade it through the streets to prove that this man was not the Messiah? If the disciples stole it (that's another argument), why did they die for what they knew to be a lie? A man might die for what he believes to be the truth, but he will not die for what he knows to be a lie.

The same is true of the suggestion that the resurrection appearances were just hallucinations. They just don't fit the psychological criteria for such phenomena. Hallucinations occur usually to just one person who desperately wants to see the deceased person. Jesus appeared always to groups of people, and normally they had given up all hope that he would rise from the dead.

Hallucinations usually continue over a lengthy period of time. Jesus showed himself alive for about 40 days and then disappeared from the earth. Because of evidence like this, scholars hold that no fact of history has been examined so comprehensively by legal, medical, psychological, historical and religious experts and emerged so unchallenged as to its veracity.

If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then we can be sure of nothing in mankind's past history. But perhaps one of the best proofs that he must have risen from the dead was the effect it had on the people who followed him.

What was it that changed a band of frightened, cowardly disciples into men of courage and conviction? What was it that changed Peter from one who the night before the crucifixion, was so afraid for his own skin that he three times denied he even knew Jesus, and he was changed into a roaring lion of the faith?

Some 50 days later, Peter risked his life by saying that he had seen Jesus risen from the dead. He preached it in Jerusalem, where the events had taken place, where the facts could be verified, and where his life was in danger. Only the reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus could have produced this change in the disciples.

Only the resurrection of this man from the dead could split history into B.C. and A.D. It's amazing, isn't it? Here we are; we talk about "before Christ", and we talk about "Anno Domini", in the year of our Lord, or after Christ. We split the whole of history into half on the basis of this man's birth and death.

Why would we do that unless there were something incredibly remarkable about this man which sets him apart from all other men. Why do we still keep Christmas? I know we can argue about the winter solstice, and about all kinds of heathen practices, but the fact remains we still talk about Christmas, "Christ Mass". We still talk about Christ. We still talk about the baby in the manger.

Is it just because we like babies and we like giving presents? Well, we certainly do that. But, don't you think that mankind is not just idiotic? We're not just a bunch of insane people who are utterly unbalanced. We actually do respect, and make a lot of things that are actually worthy of respect and worth making a lot of.

In other words, we need some justification for the attention and the importance we give to certain things. Really, one of the greatest arguments for believing that this man did rise from the dead is the place that he has in history, and the place of respect that he has in all of our minds.

This man, Jesus, was the Son of God and has power over death. Let's talk a little more about the implications of that next time.