WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?
Program 94
Preoccupation with Self-Esteem and Self-Worth
by Ernest O'Neill

Have you ever stuck an earring in your nose? Have you ever shaved half of your head and dyed the other half green? You say, "Don't be ridiculous! I'm not a punker! No! I wouldn't dream of doing that. That's for the half-integrated people. That's for the people who are immature. That's not the kind of thing I would do. No! I wouldn't touch it."

Have you ever bought a car because it looked the coolest thing on the road? Have you ever bought a winter coat because it would make you different from the other people in your office, and they would notice you? Have you ever bought a lipstick because the color was rather different, and set forth the difference between you and others, and the uniqueness that your appearance has over that of others?

"Well, yes, I have, but I mean, that's just personal taste. Of course, everybody buys things because it enables them to be themselves. That's all I'm being. I'm just being myself." But don't you see really that whether you stick an earring in your nose, or whether you dye half of your hair green or not, or whether you buy a car that just looks different from everybody else, there is a lurking tendency deep down in all of us to do things primarily to get attention, primarily to get people to notice us, and often just to express the fact that we're different from everybody else.

If you say, "Well, I am different from everybody else. I mean, I am. I'm unique!" Yes, I agree. You are unique. There's nobody like you in the universe. There's never been anyone like you. There never will be anyone like you. You say, "Yeah, yeah, I know that. But everybody else doesn't seem to know it, so I want

to get them to know it." Then I say to you, "Well, why do you?" You say, "Just because it's true. It's right."

But really, isn't it a fact that the reason we do it is because we feel we are unique but nobody else notices it, and we feel that we need it to be noticed? We feel our uniqueness is there to be noticed, that we were put here in this world for somebody to appreciate us, for somebody to acknowledge us, for somebody to notice the little private things that we have that nobody else has. We feel we were put here for someone else to be aware of it.

In fact, we were. We were put here by a dear Creator who made us, who does love you, and who does know you, and who knows better than even your mother knows how unique you are. But, of course, we have given up believing in Him, and we have given up even trusting Him. So, we have determined we'll live this life as practical atheists. But what we lack is this sense of acknowledgment from Him, this sense of love that He has for us. So, we have to get it from somewhere.

Most of us have committed ourselves to trying to get it from other people. That's the origin of a great deal of the antics we get up to from when we were little children wanting our mother to be impressed with the way we have stuck all the little pins into our clothing, or the way we have messed up all the porridge or the corn flakes she gave us. Or the way we have beaten our spoon on the chair so that the people who were visiting our parents would see that we're there.

Right from those early antics, right up to the time when we get our gold watch after 30 or 40 years of service to our firm, we have been anxious for somebody to notice us, to see that we are different and that we are unique. We have a great sense of a need for love, a need for somebody to love us and to value us.

So, we have started to try to substitute for that love the approval of other people.

That's why we get into this business of preoccupation with self esteem and self worth and why we go into these psychological deep discussions and all these sensitivity groups and all this therapeutic attention that we give to each other, because we're all intent on trying to get the love that we need and that we were made for. You were actually made for that love.

But it's a love that is the love of the one significant "other" in the universe, not the love of all the other insignificant "others" in the universe. But, of course, we try to find that. You know it makes us into monsters. You know that those of us who are husbands and fathers, how we insist that the wife treats us, as maybe not the lord of the manor, or the king of the kingdom, but we certainly demand that she treat us as the head of this home and as somebody important. Often, we get very irritable with her because she does not seem to give us our place.

Indeed, it's funny how that phrase would come up in many of our homes. The children would often say it. The wives would often say it. "Well, I'm not given my place. I'm not given the place of respect that I should have. People, the others in the home, don't really value me. They don't really appreciate me." So often we cry ourselves to sleep, or we grieve ourselves to sleep, through feeling that other people aren't giving us the attention we ought to have.

It's the same in the office. You know how in the business, whether we're bosses or whether we're sub-bosses, or whether we're little nothings trying to wield our little bit of power, we're intent on trying to get people to notice we are something. We are something. We control this office. We control these forms.

If we're bureaucrats, you know how it goes. We feel we're part of an impersonal system anyways. The only way we can get any personality into it is if we wield our little bit of influence. Often, we make life intolerable for other people. We're so anxious to get our little bit of attention. So, it makes us into clowns; clowns that become the play things of other people. Other people can play on us like a violin. They can treat us like puppets and marionettes.

If they just give us our strokes, if they just give us our little bit of attention, we will stand up and beg. We will go through all kinds of silly activities, and silly performances, just to get another little cookie of love from them. We become, really, cookie monsters. We just will gobble up cookies. We'll gobble up any little bit of praise or attention that they will give us.

So, of course, we have become very perverted in our personalities. We've become like little actors and actresses who are always on show. We are always on. We're always trying to get people to love us. We'll do anything for that. We'll actually compromise our principles. We'll act against our own best understanding of things. We'll act against our own best interests at times, just to get people to attend to us, and give us a little bit of that love that we were made for. So our personalities have become perverted.

We've become utterly dominated by man fear. It started off as men's approval. It started off as a desire for men to acknowledge us and approve of us. But as we become dominated by that desire, then we begin to fear their disapproval. We begin to fear their frowns, the bosses' frowns or the wives' frowns. We begin to hate and fear disapproval. We begin to come under men fear. Our lives become dominated by fear of men.

We become driven people, who are driven to do things just to avoid other people disapproving of us. Our lives come under not the love of men, but the fear of men. We're afraid to say what we believe is right in the office, lest people think we're square or stupid or old fashioned, and we begin to be the very opposite of what we are, because of men fear. So, this is one of the ways in which we have become perverted in our personalities: through depending on people and their love, in place of the love of the Creator, in whom we have stopped believing and trusting.

There are some other consequences of this turning to the world of things from the world of God Himself. Let's share a little more tomorrow about it. It will perhaps give you some insight into yourself.