Program 03
We All Exercise Faith Everyday
by Ernest O'Neill

What is faith? A lot of us feel, "Oh, faith is something that is somewhere between fantasy and fairy tale. Faith is something that religious people exercise for no reason at all or because they have nothing else to cling to." But actually, as we've been sharing over the past couple of days, faith is something that all of us exercise every day in our lives. Just as you are sitting in rush hour traffic at the moment, and you see the stop lights of the car in front brighten up, you put your foot on the brake pedal of your car. And you put absolute faith in the confident expectation that your car will stop. And you put your faith in your brakes. And you put your faith in the action of your foot on the pedal that it will in fact bring the car to a stop.

And so, it is in almost everything we do in our lives. You put a letter into the mail box with the confidence and the faith that that will get to the person you have addressed it to and that he will read the information or she will read the information that you have written there.

You put your faith in the phone and its ability to get you into contact with the person on the other side of the city or in fact, on the other side of the world if necessary. And you put your faith in the phone, and you make an appointment to call at a certain time and you're absolutely certain that you'll get through to them, in spite of the amazing fact that often you don't get through. Often it has happened that the brake has not been in good order and has failed. Very often, the mail has not reached its destination in time. And so, it's not that these things are absolutely certain or that they have never failed. But it is that this world of ours is such a place that the only way you can live or act is if you put the best

possible estimate and evaluation and construction on the facts that you have observed. And so, you act on that basis.

And that's why it's foolish, I think, to say that faith is just a fantasy or a kind of train of ideas in your mind or some silly set of superstitions that certain people have. Faith is not something that exists in your mind at all. Faith is not just something that you feel inside you. Faith is exactly what you are expressing when you put your foot on the brake pedal of your car. Faith is action. That's what we mean when we say that everyday life is filled with faith, because everyday life is filled with actions that we engage upon on the basis of certain beliefs that we have about events and people and circumstances and machinery.

For instance, it's amazing how many of us are increasingly living by faith these days. When you think of the whole computer revolution that has taken place, and you realize how many of us are transferring thousands of dollars of receivables and payables off pages and ledgers that we could see and are transferring them by punching them in on something that looks like a typewriter into some electronic drum that we cannot even see. We cannot take the floppy or the rigid discs out of the computer and point out and say, "Ah, there's the $3467.97." We can't even do that. All we can do is look at this silly old floppy disc or this rigid disc and we can say, "No, all our receivables, all the money that people owe us is on that, and we're confident of that. And the only reason we're confident of that is that the woman or the man that punches this stuff into the computer is actually using the series of positive and negative charges that make up the machinery of the computer, and they are registering on these little discs. And we can be sure that we can get them back onto the screen. We have of course tried that on several occasions and we've managed to remember some of what we've put in. Or, we've been able to check it against certain ledgers and we've found that it's correct.

And so, we put our faith absolutely in the fact that that's always going to work, in spite of the fact that it hasn't always worked, in spite of the fact that somebody has turned off the electricity and we haven't had the kind of computer that had sufficient back-up or sufficient battery power and we have actually lost all our receivables or payables. Indeed, many of us have called up famous companies and failed to get through because we're told, "Oh, the computer is down." And yet, in spite of these many failings, we are continuing to put our faith in computers and in their ability to actually run our businesses for us. That's what we ask them to do. We ask them to date and age our receivables and to tell us when we should pay certain bills and when we should leave certain bills unpaid another month.

And so, in all kinds of ways, we are putting more and more faith into things like computers. So, in the whole electronic development, we are surrounded by increasingly putting our faith in things that we cannot see and things we cannot touch. Indeed, when you think of the absolute revolution that is taking place in the banking world, and you realize that we all put our faith absolutely in the fact that our money somewhere is stored up for us in some vault somewhere. In spite of the fact we're not sure which vaults they're in, and we're not really sure who has the exact tally of those amounts, yet, we put our faith in the fact that these things are so. Many of us of course who do not check up on our cheque stubs regularly put our faith absolutely in the ability of the bank to count our money for us.

And so, in everyday life, we are filling our days, and our hours and our evenings with actions that are based on our faith that certain things will work as they are said to work, or as we have observed them working in the past. And it is even more true as we get into the world of international affairs and we realize what faith we put in our armed forces being able to control the missiles

in all kinds of hidden places where we are not really sure they exist. We don't really know where the submarines are. We don't really know where the bombers are that are constantly in the air with those bombs that will protect us from our enemies. But we put our faith in all of these things. And yet, we couldn't be absolutely certain with mathematical certainty that they are all exactly as we believe them to be.

So, our everyday life is filled not with superstitions, not with fantasies, not with ideas that just stay in our heads, but with actual actions that we produce day after day that are based on the belief we have that certain things are true. And that's why it's vital to see that faith is not just a superstition. It's not just a fantasy. It's not just something next door to a fairy tale. But faith is action based on reasonable evidence that we have examined with our minds or observed over a period of time. Faith is something that we use everyday in our lives.