WHAT IS FAITH?

The Precision of the Universe

by Ernest O'Neill Program no.07

What is faith? Well, we have been saying that faith is the factor that we all use for everything that we do and say and think everyday in our lives. And that seems a very broad statement to make. But, in fact, it is true. When you married, you observed the person that you were going to marry. You got to know her or you go to know him. You came to love him. You estimated as best you could what that person was going to be like in the rest of their life, even though that was a ridiculously difficult thing to do. Then on the basis of your faith in that person, you made one of the most important moves in your life. In regard to your cars or the buying of your houses or the buying of your stocks and shares you exercised the same kind of faith. You judged the evidence of your senses as best you could. You estimated whether this seemed a good stock to buy, and on the basis of the reasonable observations that you'd made, you decided this was the step to take. You believed it in your mind and you acted upon it in your will. This is what faith is; it is action based on belief of reasonable evidence. That is the way we live our whole lives and it is the best we can do. We may think it would be nice to have mathematical or scientific certainty about every- thing, but actually about very little in this life do we have real mathematical or scientific certainty. Even when we make measurements we are only talking to the nearest millionth or thousandth of an inch or a centimeter and never in absolute, precise terms. So everything in our lives is based on judgement of reasonable evidence, and what we believe in the light of that judgement and what we do in the light of that belief.
So that is the kind of basis of our whole lives and of all our behaviour and that's the kind of faith that we're applying to the

ultimate realities of life, and of course I'm suggesting that it's very important that we apply that to the existence of the world itself. It's very important that we are as absolutely certain as we can be about our faith in the way this world eventually originated, and we evolved or were created.

And you remember I suggested to you that it was very reasonable to believe that all the parts of this world came together by time plus chance. And I suggested the analogy of your automobile - that it was very reasonable to believe and to have faith in the idea that your automobile came together through some manufacturer gathering all the parts and putting them into a huge washing machine, whirling them around at thousands of revolutions an hour, and then popping out your car after a spell of that kind of treatment.

And you know of course, that you will say immediately, "No I have no faith in that ....that's stupid) I know that this automobile required great care and great planning and close analytical thinking and judgement and the exercise of great discipline bymany hands or many robots to produce it. And so I know that this automobile did not come about through time plus chance."

And, of course, what I'm asking you to consider today is, what is your faith about the way the world was originated? And is it not true that many of us today are putting our faith in an absolutely ridiculous idea? We're putting our faith in the idea that this world itself came about by time plus chance ... that however complex it is, it came about by the kind of chance conglomeration of atoms that is the result of the whirling of chance over a great period of time.

And yet it's ridiculous to say this. When you examine the world itself, you find there are all kinds of complicated functions performed by the most minute mechanisms in the world that operate to very close tolerances both in time and in space. And this, of course, is paralleled by the huge movements that are made in the universe by mighty planets and stars in set orbits and yet they move close to amazing tolerances, in order to avoid

collisions in the universe. And so the whole earth, whether you look at the setting of the sun and the rising of the sun, or even if you look at the circulation of the blood and you think that it contains over sixty-four substances and yet never turns into sludge. When you think of the size of the earth, if it were much smaller, an atmosphere would be impossible... that is, if it were like Mercury or the moon. if it were much larger, the atmosphere would contain free hydrogen like Jupiter and Saturn. Its distance from the sun is absolutely correct. Even a small change would make it too hot or too cold. Our moon, probably responsible for the continents and the ocean basins, is unique in our solar system and seems to have originated in a way quite different from the other relatively much smaller moons. The tilt of the earth's axis ensures the seasons.

And so it goes on. All kinds of evidence of complex tolerances and complex designs that are very hard to believe that existed or originated from the operation of time plus chance. Indeed, some mathematicians have calculated it, and one of the French mathematicians says, "The chance formulations of a typical protein molecule made up of 3,000 atoms is of the order of 1 to 2.02 multiplied by 10 to the two hundred-thirty-first;" or practically nil. Even if the elements are shaken up at the speed of the vibration of light, it would take 10 to the two hundred thirty-fourth billions of years to get the protein molecule for life, and life on the earth is limited to about 2 billion years. And so even at the most generous estimate of the age of the earth, it is not at all reasonable to believe that it came about by time plus chance. Somehow, atoms were falling down in verti cal lines and two of them happened to bump into each other and then others built up like a snowball and somehow or other by time plus chance over billions and billions of years this complicated world originated.

If we put our faith in that, then we are exercising a kind of Alice in Wonderland fantasy. We are not exercising the faith that we exercise day after day in our ordinary life, because faith is belief

and action based on reasonable evidence and this is not belief and action based on reasonable evidence.
The reasonable evidence of our senses and of the careful observations that our scientists have made over the centuries is that we're facing a complicated mechanism- indeed a complicated organism, that has been designed with great intelligence and with great and careful judgement and has been put together with methods and with mechanisms and machinations that we cannot even imitate in our present day. With our most complicated robots we can produce nothing that is as smooth and as flexible, as resilient and adjustable as the human body. And we have nothing, of course, as flexible and as intuitive and as clever as the human mind, however much money we have put into our computers. So if we have exercised so much analytical judgement and so much discipline of our hands and our brains in order to produce the few things that men have made on the earth, then surely the same analytical judgement and the same careful manipulation of mechanical devices was needed to produce a world as complex as this one in which we live. Surely, that is a reasonable faith to live by.