WHAT IS FAITH?

Is It Reasonable to Believe in a Personal Creator?

by Ernest O'Neill Program 12

What kind of faith do you have? And you may say, "Oh faith! I couldn't be bothered with that stuff. Faith is superstition. Its the resort of a weak mind. Faith is not something that I would have anything to do with."
And yet, if I ask you, "Do you believe that if you put our key in the ignition of your car and turned it your car will start?" You would say, "Oh of course, of course I do." And if I asked you, "Well isn't that faith? You might say, "No, no. That's mathematical and scientific certainty."

In which case I would ask you, "Has it ever failed to start?"
And you would say, "Oh well, yes, it has."
Then I would have to submit to you that that isn't mathematical or scientific certainty. That is in fact faith. It's believing that something will happen on the basis of the observations that you have made and the reasonable evidence that has been presented to you over a period of time. And it's the action that stems from that belief. And that's exactly what faith is.

What we've been sharing is that it's very reasonable to have faith in the idea that the world around us with its order and design and its clever complexity and its evidence of much more intricate design than we human beings ourselves can produce in our man-made objects was created by someone that had at least as much of a mind as we have and as much of a will as we have.

Yesterday we were sharing that when you look at the personality that we have you must admit that it's reasonable to have faith

that that was made by a person at least as personable as we are. And it's certainly not very logical to have faith in the idea that that personality of yours resulted from an inanimate object like a stone sitting there over billions and billions of years. You've probably observed lots of inanimate objects and you've never seen than turn into an animate object. And there's no reason it will do so.

It's also very reasonable to have faith in the idea that someone as personable as you made you for instance. It does not seem reasonable to have faith in the idea that something like a dog or a monkey or a worm made you. You normally assume that it was someone as personable as you and as thoughtful and as intellectual as you that was able to make you as you are. It takes somebody more personable or more personal or at least as personal as a person to make a person.

C.S. Lewis, of course, urged some other reasons for having faith in the idea that there was a personable being behind our creation in some way. He urges us to look at the paradox; and the paradox is this, of course. Here we are--a mass of selfish individuals, self-assertive, self-centered, self-defensive creatures, who find it natural to stand up for our own rights, to get our own way, however that affects other people. That's the kind of people we are. We're always fighting, internationally, nationally, socially, personally. The more of us that are born the more of us murder, lie, steal, fornicate. That's true. I mean if you think of it the bigger a city gets the more of a jungle it becomes. Individually we are amazed at how much easier it is to do wrong than to do right, to lose our temper than to keep it, to criticize others than to praise them. And yet C.S. Lewis points out, in spite of the fact that all these things come easier to us, we still say they're wrong.

Now why? Where does that idea of wrong come from, and that idea of right come from? Where does this sense of feeling we ought to do certain things and we ought not to do other things come from? Where does this sense of moral rightness come from?

It's certainly a nuisance to us. it causes us guilt, and often induces us to do things that are to our disadvantage. And that's true, when you think of it. Your conscience often causes you great trouble and great inconvenience. Why should a squabbling, arguing bunch of selfish creatures think that their squabbling, arguing and selfishness are wrong, unless someone else above them was getting that message to them.
And that's C.S. Lewis' point. Is it not reasonable to have faith in the idea that somebody, somewhere has fed us these ideas of right and wrong...when you realize that doing right and avoiding wrong is very inconvenient to us, and does not come naturally to us at all? In other words this law of nature that makes us feel that we ought to do certain things, is not natural to us in our behavior. It's something that is very unnatural to us.

Now, of course, some of us would try to answer Lewis and say, "Well it's our herd instinct, I mean it kind of makes us want to stick together. But the fact is that often we act against our herd instinct. For instance, if someone falls into the water and is drowning, well, your herd instinct certainly might argue for you jumping in and saving them, but there is another instinct that operates too ... your self-preservation instinct. That makes you not want to risk your own life. And so it seems that conscience or the feeling that you ought to do certain things is something deeper than your instinct. It's something deeper than just your herd instinct, or deeper than your self preservation instinct. it's something that comes in and judges between two instincts, and sends you at one time against one instinct and at another time against another instinct.

Some of us say "Well I mean it's the kind of behavior that's convenient to us." But the fact is, often we feel that we ought to do certain things that are very inconvenient to us. We feel we ought to go and visit someone on a very snowy winter's night and it isn't convenient for us at all to do that.

Some of us say, "Oh, well. It's behavior that pays. That's what conscience urges you to. That's the explanation of the sense of moral right that we have. It's behavior that pays. But, no. It often costs us dearly ... the things that we do that we think we ought to do. Especially when you think of the people in plane crashes that have saved other people and have given up their own lives to do so. That cost them dearly, and yet they did it.

Some of us say, "Well it's what we're educated to do. You know. It's the behavior that we're educated to have. It's that we're brought up in a certain way; we're brought up to respect certain morals and certain attitudes and certain actions. It's just bred into us. Well, of course, we have to still answer the question, "Why did it originally start?" Who originally started those ideas? But the fact is that the standards that we have of morality or of what we ought to do or what we ought not to do and of right and wrong are so universal, that they cannot be tied simply to education. For instance, it doesn't matter which tribe you visit, however, primitive or which people, however sophisticated. No one believes it's right to turn away in battle. Everyone believes that cowardice is wrong. No one believes it's right to do your friend a harm or do him down. Everybody believes it's right to be loyal to your friends. So the things that we believe to be right or believe to be wrong seem to be universal ... things that actually are found in all nations and in all peoples.

And so Lewis says "it's very reasonable to have faith in the idea that these ideas of right and wrong came from beyond space."