

## **“I came from where?” Approaching the science of human origin from religious perspectives – Fr. Thomas Weinandy, OFM, Cap., Ph.D., Roman Catholic Introduction and personal statement**

This video was recorded at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History on March 28, 2011

Fr. Thomas Weinandy: 00:20 My name is Tom Weinandy. I'm a Roman Catholic priest. I belong to the Franciscan order. The order founded by St. Francis of Assisi. I have a doctorate in historical theology, and I have taught most of my life. I taught for 12 years at the University of Oxford in England. Presently though I'm the executive director for doctrine at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. (00:49) The question that was posed to us is, "I came from where?" When you ask a Catholic where they came from, or where'd you come from, the more educated Catholic or normal Catholic would have at least a two-fold answer to that question. One would be theological and the other would be the scientific answer. And simultaneously Catholics, on the whole, would want to see both the theological answer, the faith answer, and the scientific answer to be compatible. They would not want to see that what science says and what their faith tells them is contradictory or incompatible with one another. (01:38) And the reason that they would want to hold that is that they believe that God is somehow or other the source of both answers. That he is the one who's responsible for their faith, but equally as the creator, somehow or other, he's also responsible for what is true and good science. That he is ultimately the source of all truth, whether it's theological truth or scientific truth. Thus in our schools and our colleges, the teaching of both science and theology takes place. And both are taken as learn to be something that the students should not only know the best science, and the best theology and understanding of their faith, but to be able to integrate the two so that they can see the compatibility between what the science has say and what they believe because of their faith, because of their Catholic upbringing. (02:38) Now, the scientific theories of the origin of human beings would be presented then in a specifically scientific manner and the scientific evidence for the origin of human beings, the evolution of human beings, would be presented in our

schools on the whole. And so they would study about the homo erectus, the neanderthal, the homo sapiens, et cetera, and learn how biologically over many millions, maybe billions of years, that the human being has evolved from stage to stage. And that their ancestors are those who went before them [inaudible 00:03:30] millions of years ago. And that they should look upon these people as their ancestors, maybe not so much as human ancestors from the beginning, but that those who went before them were evolving into what they actually came to be, they are part of the whole evolutionary process. (03:51) From a theological and faith perspectives, Catholics would also acknowledge that God is responsible for our existence. He intended that human beings would evolve. He wanted human beings to be the summit of his good creation, the summit in a sense of the evolutionary process. Moreover Catholics would also want to say that he is the one in the course of human evolution who gave human beings a rational intellectual principle, what is traditionally be called a soul. And so human beings would know the truth because of this and that they would have free will. And of course, the ability to know the truth is part of what it means to truly be human. As well as to choose freely is what is part of being truly human. And the ultimate expression of this is that we are able to know the truth of one another from a Catholic's perspective and human perspective, and also to be able then to freely choose to love one another. (05:03) Ultimately this ability to know, and to love, is to know and love God and know his love and goodness to each of us. For a Catholic, also what is important is not simply where we come from, but where, but who we are. In the course of evolution and in the obtaining of rationality, human beings, accordance with our faith in the scriptures are in the image and likeness of God. And again, to be in the image and likeness of God is again, to be able like God, to know and to love. To do godlike things like being charitable, kind, forgiving, generous, all of these various virtues. And for Catholics it's precisely because, as for Christians on the whole, that gives human beings their unique dignity, their unique value that exceeds the rest of finite creation. That human beings, precisely because, in some sense, they are in the image of God that they are unique and they have infinite value like God and infinite dignity. (06:19) Within Catholic

education then, this is what it means to be human. That is to be in the image and likeness of God. And this is what the students seek to understand and live out. Catholic students can ask all the scientific questions that they may, comes to their minds. And the schools try to give all the scientific answers, possible scientific answers, that can be given. Especially what is considered today the best science by our best scientists. (06:52) They can [inaudible 00:06:52] ask all the various philosophical and theological questions, and learn all what possible philosophical, theological answers. They are to learn how to integrate all of this together, which is not an easy task for young people, let alone for us as well. How do we always combine what we know to be true from science and what we believe and know to be true because of our religious faith? And yet within the Catholic educational system, the whole idea is to be able to, that the whole person is able to come to know the whole of what is true. Both within the area of science, but also within the area of philosophy and theology and all the other related disciplines. (07:41) For Catholics too, what's important is not simply, and for Christians again, what is important is not simply where we came from. Ultimately, the big question is where we're going. And again, we would believe and hold that through Jesus there is a new creation. That the end of evolution is a new way of life. Ultimately the eternal life with God and with one another. So I hope that that in some ways helps you understand the Catholic understanding of where we came from, why it's important, who we are, and ultimately where we think we're going. Thank you very much.

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