Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker – How do you understand the relationships between science and your religious or secular tradition?

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Mary Evelyn Tucker: 00:27 I think the relationship between science and religion is absolutely vital for our planet, for our country, for academia, and well beyond. And I think a lot of great work has been done. Certainly here at the Smithsonian, in the work you've done at the American Advancement of Science, Jim. And as well, the sense of the Zygon group, the IRAS group, the Institute for Religion in the Age of Science, a lot of conversation has taken place, in academia and beyond. (01:02) But the conversation I think is still a little bit stalled, partly because we have these models that either we're contesting one another, religion and science, or there's two magisterium, as Stephen Jay Gould would say. But it's very difficult to get beyond mutual respect and a rather dualistic view. (01:26) So one of the things that we've been trying to do in this Journey of the Universe project, a film and a book and a series of conversation, is to bring science and religion into, I would suggest, a new kind of fusion even. That what we're doing in that film and book is to say, "Here's a scientific fact, the origin of the universe," but to give it a metaphor that says, "How does this relate in terms of the human and imagination?" But then also, what's the significance for us as humans, so that all of these emergent properties from galaxies and stars to planetary systems, to the emergence of the earth and plate tectonics and so on, we can understand the facts scientifically, but we need to absorb them as a story. And as a story where we are part of this emerging universe. (02:21) So when we come to human origins, this amazing, quite a few million years of hominid history still being argued about, but if we take 200,000 years of Homo sapien sapiens, we have a long lineage of adaptation of climate change, of environmental changes. And I think what's so great about the exhibit here is it's bringing together again science, but with a sense of investigating not only our past, our cultural developments, our music, our ability ritualize death and so on, to create community, to come to a hearth, to use tools. This exhibit illustrates, I think, the most amazing coming together of science and culture and anthropology, and with early religious sensibilities. (03:16) But most especially, I think one of its great values is it's asking who are we as humans, which is a question that brings together science and religion, science and humanities, science and
values. And it brings it together in a way that invites us to imagine what the future is for humans, for our Homo sapiens species. And that can we earn our full name of wisdom keepers? And can we draw on the wisdom traditions of all the religions, the Abrahamic traditions, the Asian religion, the indigenous traditions. To say, "We need to imagine a future that's not just sustainable, but that's flourishing for future generations and for the ecosystems which support us." (04:06) So I think it's one of the best examples of this deepening conversation of science and religion, but with a sense of our human purpose, our meaning-making, our creativity for a flourishing earth community. Very, very exciting project here at the museum (04:32) We know we have immense challenges at the present and certainly into the decades ahead, and it will take a new deepening dialogue. Even this fusion, more than just tolerance between science and religion, but a really deepening dialogue of what brings us together as people interested in the scientific fact, as those interested in values and ethics and in a life of the soul and heart and mind. (05:02) And I think one of the things that we share as scientists and as people in religious communities, is a sense of the wonder and awe and beauty of this epic of evolution. That if it took 14 billion years to bring us to the present, that should hopefully be a basis on which both science and religion can cooperate, and say the future of this magnificent process rests in our decisions largely. And rests in our intelligence to say, "How are we going to align ourselves with these creative, emerging, self-organizing, symbiotic processes?" It's not going to be easy, but wonder will be a fountain, I think, of creativity for us. So that's one area in which we can find our common ground and work together. (05:56)

Of course there's issues of can science enter into ethics? But I think, as Thomas Lovejoy would say, the scientists who invented the word biodiversity, that scientists are citizens too. And that they have a deep sense of responsibility for what they're studying, for the health of ecosystems and so on. And he's been very devoted to biodiversity in conservation efforts and help found conservation biology. Which was a big step for science to say, "We're not just studying these systems, we're trying to help conserve them." (06:30) So the challenge in science is in part can we study systems objectively? National Science Foundation grants give to excellence in science, but they're also beginning to give to and require, what are the consequences for society. And in 1997, when Jane Lubchenco, the President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, gave her presidential address out in Seattle, it was science in service to society, along the motto of AAAS, but science with a new contract for society. And especially bringing in these ecological challenges. And I think the Ecological Society
of America is working in this direction to have dialogues and conversations, but also in what is a science of resilience, of sustainability, of restoration. (07:23) So science is moving there. And I think if the religious community can meet them there with similar types of concerns, what can religious communities bring to these ecological issues? Because frankly, the religious communities are late, but they're indispensable. So science is necessary, but it's not sufficient without religion, and vice versa. So we know that we have to find a language that goes beyond just rhetoric, moralizing on the side of religion, but with a sense that our common future depends in so many ways on this deepening notion that our past, evolutionary past, will only go forward with this sense, we need a shared future. (08:15)

And so policy has got to now include the voices of the religious communities from all over the world, and this is beginning to happen. What's a Confucian ethics look like for the environment, a Hindu ethics? The Abrahamic traditions have developed robust and diversified senses of what is stewardship, not dominion. But how do we care for these systems and work with the human issues of justice and injustice of people who are being adversely affected by climate change and a whole range of issues. (08:48) So I think we can do this, it's going to take time. But deepening the conversation, beginning with shared sense of and awe. And then coming up with ethical principles that can assist efforts that resilience and restoration ecologies, that are emerging all over the world now.

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