Evolution and the Anthropocene: Science, Religion, and the human future – how can individuals, communities, and global leadership work together to mitigate the impacts of climate change?

This video was recorded at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History on May 22, 2016

Rick Potts: 00:24 One of the things that has been emphasized here, and I think I’m not sure I agree with it entirely is that starting with small groups is the way to go. We do live in communities and communities are really important and they’ve got to be part of our future perspective and approach to things. But we also need a global perspective. We are a species. The reason why there is an Anthropocene, the reason why the human footprint is so deep and pervasive is because we are a global species. And I think that some ways, I think we need a new origins narrative to enable us to see us all as interconnected. And this is also part of what's been emphasized as part of a religious perspective, but a planetary species perspective has got to be a very important part of the scale. (01:20)

The multiple scales from communities all the way up to seeing ourselves as united, potentially as an antidote to the divisiveness and the factions that develop so easily in our societies and across the globe.

David Sloan Wilson: 01:44 Let me stress that, first of all, I agree with that and secondly, that is part of the message as I intended it. The last sentence of my book, Does Altruism Exist, is that we must be planetary altruist. We must plan for the welfare of the whole planet. And so we must have the planet in mind, but at the same time, as far as the implementation is concerned and that has to somehow be made salient at a smaller scale. And often that's why various forms of reinforcements. Moral injunctions against nuclear arms or planetary welfare don't go far enough basically (02:18)

They tend to wear thin almost immediately. So there has to be some sense in which doing the right thing. We have to be in a low footprint city and a low footprint neighborhood. And if we are, we have to get praised or some other, something that basically is reinforcing on a smaller scale. And that's what's so, I think, admirable
about the smaller group, such as the one that I reported on the [eco-village 00:02:41]. I mean, they actually do it. And did I tell you the average income is $10,000 a year, which gets you abject poverty any place else? And so they're making it work at a small scale and I think if you didn't have that scale, if you take those very same individuals and you were to disperse them, then that would not work. And so you need the planetary scale, as you say, and then at the same time, there has to be this multicellular basis, Stewart, in my opinion.

Rev. Peter F. Ryan: 03:15 Just a brief word about the encyclical and that is that it's wonderful that it brings out the point that science and religious concern and faith are not only not opposed to each other, but that properly understanding religion and Christian revelation requires us to be genuinely concerned as the title of the document says, be probably concerned for our common home.

Mary Evelyn Tucker: 03:46 I think there's almost no document that's more important right now especially for Rick's point, but it goes back to David's, it's a call for all people, not just Christians, but it's especially important because it brings together ecology and justice. And while many religious communities have had a strong sense of human justice and social justice indispensable, but they've often not gotten the connection with the environment. And so this brings it together. And I just want to give a big shout out to the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting with John and Ken Sawyer who are here because they've done amazing work on reporting environmental work, justice work, women's work, and so on. (04:26) And in fact, at a conference in China last summer on ecological civilization and bringing together religion and media and government and civil society and business along these issues and there's an ebook on this on their website, the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting. There's groups doing amazing things to help build the global context for this.

David Sloan Wilson: 04:51 And finally that's where the inner spiritual movement is exceptionally strong was through the United Nations with the climate change. Bunches of those guys were in Paris. As you can imagine that some of the non-profits and non-
governmental organizations associated with the United Nations, that's where you have this confluence of religious and spiritual traditions and that's where these people are most active in some ways they're basically to have that common space.

Return to the web page for this video, “Evolution and the Anthropocene: Science, Religion, and the human future – how can individuals, communities, and global leadership work together to mitigate the impacts of climate change?”