Well, Teilhard de Chardin, was a man of great insight. I say that with some pride because I too I'm a Catholic priest and a member of his religious order the Jesuits. St. Paul in a passage that I'm sure had to have inspired Teilhard, speaks of creation groaning with labor pains, awaiting the revelation of the children of God with eager expectation so that it can be set free from its slavery to corruption and share the glorious freedom of the children of God. (00:58) Now, the children of God will enjoy that glorious freedom only when they reach what Teilhard, calls the Omega Point. According to Teilhard, the Omega Point will arrive only after a process of evolution that as Dr. Wilson, pointed out is greater than just genetic evolution, broader than that. There's a great deal to admire in Teilhard's work and in Dr. Wilson's presentation. Biological evolution is indeed compatible with Christian faith, and one might reasonably use the word evolution when speaking not just of genetic evolution, but also of other human developments like symbolic thought that we inherit from our ancestors. And reflection on evolution can evoke wonder as Mary Evelyn, was saying, at what God has in store when creation reaches its ultimate culmination. But at the risk of coming across something like a skunk at a garden party, I'd like to offer three cautions which I think are appropriate from the perspective of both faith and reason. (02:21) Dr. Sloan, spoke of interspirituality, and there's a lot that's wonderful about that for people of different faiths to be able to cooperate with each other, to try to understand reality, to advance human society, all of that is definitely to the good. But a believer in the Judeo-Christian tradition, I think needs to understand spirituality is primarily responding to a God who reveals himself, reveals himself first by bringing the universe into existence. The universe exists only because, I'm speaking as a believer now, but I think in a way that's perfectly
compatible with reason and that can be vindicated through reason, only because God freely brought it into being out of nothing. This is the doctrine of creation, which is a truth not only of faith but of reason, because it makes no sense I'd say to think that the universe somehow showed up all by itself. (03:19) Let me put the point differently. We can reasonably affirm the theory of the Big Bang, I do. But the Big Bang could never have happened without a creator God setting the conditions for it to happen. And by the way, the one who first proposed the Big Bang theory was another Catholic priest, Father Georges Lemaître, and he surely affirmed this truth about creation, about God's involvement. (03:45) A second caution is that while a believer in the Judeo-Christian tradition can affirm that the bodies of human beings evolve from lower animals, the believer must also affirm that human beings are not reducible to their bodies but are also spiritual beings. And I think there's some agreement there that we're talking about a kind of spiritual evolution here. But the point I think here is that we... I'm sure don't all agree on is that a distinct creative act of God is necessary for human beings to come into existence. Put differently, human beings are only able to be a new evolutionary process because God initiates that process by endowing the bodies that evolve from lower creatures with rational souls. Reason supports this point for there's no evidence that lower animals have what is necessary even as a response to environmental factors, to develop into creatures capable of, for example, learning trigonometry, although I'm not sure I'm capable of that, writing great literature or linear literature, and doing other things that only human beings are able to do. (04:59) Finally, this response to God I think, there's the spirituality I think in the sense that I would understand it, has to do with responding to a God who reveals himself. And so if we're looking forward to an Omega Point, it has to be one that God gives, and that we enjoy not just as a kind of unfolding of the way things are in this world now that human society as a whole will ultimately reach, but that we'll be able to unenjoy forever after we die. And they say that, well, it's all sort of nothing after we die, but sure enough that the human culture is going to reach that Omega Point seems to me not all that it ought to be.
Now, Teilhard, does seem to talk about reaching the Omega Point is the kind of inevitable outcome of cultural evolution and I agree with Dr. Sloan, who insist on the importance of our becoming wise managers of the evolutionary process. But I also agree as a believer with Teilhard's conviction that Christ is himself the Omega Point, and that a scripture tells us something about when he's going to come. And it doesn't seem to be that it's all going to get better, and better, and better then we finally have the Omega Point, it's rather could come at a time of great distress. So I told you I was going to be a skunk at a garden party. I hope that is at least something provocative for us to be able to reflect on, and thank you very much I look forward to our conversation.

Return to the web page for this video, Evolution and the Anthropocene: science, religion and the human future – response to presentation Fr, Peter Ryan, S.J., Us conference of Catholic Bishops