I came from where? Approaching the science of human origins from religious perspectives – How does the idea of being made in the image of God work with human evolution?

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

Audience member: 00:20  Well, I grew up kind of United Methodists, religion wise. And we’re made in the sense of God, in the eyes. So if we’re evolving from what the humans… We look through the human’s origin, are we evolving away from God or is God evolving with us? From what we look like, as humans today are not what the humans were back then. So are we evolving with God, as in the sight… As God's evolving? Or we're just different humans, so he made the original human, like not us, but… So are we evolving away from it or we evolving with him?

Nancy Howell: 00:56  Interesting question. "What would John Wesley say?" she asked herself. One thing I do know is this, John Wesley resisted referring to the image of God as the intellect, which has been fairly common in the Christian tradition. And Wesley did so because he believed or he observed that animals have intellect as well. So he located the image of God in the heart. Well not surprisingly since he understood that our relationship to God should be understood in terms of that strangely warmed heart, that Methodist talk about frequently. But Wesley didn't leave me a sermon on whether God evolves. That's the challenging part. So what's left to a United Methodist thinker today is to appreciate, first of all, that the United Methodist church affirms evolution. So it is not a conflict, at least at the denominational level, even though there might be members of the church who would have trouble with that. (02:06) But what I would say is that if I can have some confidence that God's creative work in the world attends to the fact that we are made in God's image, the question is, what does that speak to? And I think it's not so much a literalist kind of thing as it is a relational kind of thing in the Wesleyan tradition. That heart, where the image of God is located, really draws us into the idea that we have a relationship with God. And so if we are changing
as humans, then surely just as the relationship to God is different from one individual to the next and one culture to the next, surely over eons of time, our relationship to God has remained constant yet in varied forms. I think that would be highly consistent with the United Methodist point of view. (03:04) Could we say then that God evolves? Mayhaps, in the sense that what stays constant about God is God’s desire for relationship with God’s creation. What changes is that those relationships grow and multiply over time. And those relationships change because of our development and social context.

Return to the web page for this video. I came from where? Approaching the science of human origins from religious perspectives – How does the idea of being made in the image of god work with human evolution?