

## I came from where? Approaching the science of human origins from religious perspectives” – how has thinking about Human Origins changed the Catholic Church?

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

Audience member: 00:22

This one's for Father Weinandy. Traditionally, the problems with evolution that the Catholic church has had centered around human origins, monogenism, and infusion of the soul, and so forth. But in recent time, it's almost converged on intelligent design sort of concerns. It's not from the same origins as the intelligent design that the Discovery Institute represents so much. But still, the philosophically based idea of essentialism coming out of Neoplatonism and so forth. (01:10) And coming back to this idea that there are certain thresholds in evolution that it looks like to the traditional theology in the church that natural selection couldn't have gotten us over. Maybe the origin of life, the origin of the soul, and the intellect, and will in the case of humans in the origin of humans in that sense. And we've seen that represented quite recently at the highest levels. For example, the seminar that Pope Benedict had at Castel Gandolfo a couple of years ago with his former students. It was published. And then Cardinal Schonborn of Vienna had played a leading role in that seminar. (02:05) And there the concern was very much: how do we get around this problem of human origins from the traditional Augustinian or [Thomist 00:02:21] standpoint, where most of the participants in that seminar seemed to be coming from. On the other hand, we have in recent years this practically aflood of very creative work among Catholic theologians. It's practically a new field of evolutionary theology. Jack [inaudible 00:02:45] is a prominent example. Dennis Edwards. You could list a whole bunch of writers in the Catholic tradition accepting the Darwinian viewpoint without any problems. (03:02) And that doesn't seem to have penetrated to the highest levels in the church. It wasn't mentioned at all at the seminar at Castel Gandolfo. So, I'm curious to know how you see this from your vantage point with the Catholic bishops conference on the doctrinal commission. Have you noticed, or can you say anything about how much this Catholic theological tradition of evolutionary theology that's developed in recent years has penetrated the thinking of the bishops? At least in this country. Is it widely known? Is it discussed? Is there an articulable attitude that any significant number of the bishops have about this? Are they still thinking

about it basically in the old Augustinian-Thomist view that we saw in that seminar?

Father Tom Weinandy: 04:09

I don't know if I can answer your question adequately. For one thing, most bishops probably do not spend a huge amount of time thinking about evolution and human origins from a scientific perspective. With regards to the evolutionary theology, I could say this. I think one of the concerns that the bishops might have ... and I would have it myself, is there are at times within this evolutionary theology what has come to be known as pantheism. Are you acquainted with that term? (04:55) In pantheism, God is everything and everything is God. But within pantheism, while everything becomes part of God, God is more than everything. And the concern there is that within this evolutionary theology ... if you use your term, not only are our human beings are [inaudible 00:05:22] evolving, but God as well. And from a philosophic light, I don't think there's any scientific evidence that would say that God is evolving. I mean, the science doesn't treat that of question. But from a philosophical-theological point of view, it's difficult, it seems to me ... to see God in a pantheistic kind of way. That he loses what it truly means to be God in the sense of being completely other than we are. Different kind. Exist in a different kind of way. In this way, he sort of exists in a manner similar to the way we exist. (06:15) I can't get into it. But I think you have trouble if you want to hold as Christians normally do for God being that creator out of nothing, because he sort of loses the ability to do that in a pantheistic kind of manner. I mean, your questions are very, very good. I just don't know if this is quite the setting to get super involved in answering the way they need to be answered. But I think the bishops are aware of this. I don't think they have ... I don't think they have any considered opinion or judgment on it yet. But I think they do have some questions. Probably some concerns, like Schonborn or people like that.

Audience member: 07:07

I guess my first reaction to that concern about pantheism is what Mark Twain wrote in one of his books about how when he was ... I don't know, 13 or so, he thought his father was the dumbest square in the world. And when he got to be about 20 years, he was astonished at how much the old man had learned in just seven years. I wonder if it's God that we're accusing of evolving, or whether it's just our own understanding of God that has been evolving. Maybe that would answer that concern.

Father Tom Weinandy: 07:51

Okay. Thank you.

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