

Pope: no conflict between faith, science

COLOGNE, Germany – Pope Benedict XVI has said that he sees no conflict between faith and science in the exploration of the universe's development, but he has criticized those who see evolution as an explanation for everything.

The remarks, made in a discussion he hosted at Castel Gandolfo, south of Rome, with some of his former students in September last year, have been published in a German book titled "Schoepfung und Evolution" ("Creation and Evolution"). The book was published April 11 by the Sankt Ulrich Verlag publishing house.

The students have met annually since 1978 with their former doctoral supervisor, but this is the first time they have published the lectures and discussions.

During the discussion, the pope said it was not a matter of "deciding either in favor of a creationism, which out of principle excludes science from its considerations, or in favor of a theory of evolution, which underplays its own gaps and refuses to see questions which go beyond the methodological possibilities of natural science."

What was important, he said, was "the interplay of different dimensions of reason, an interplay which opens up into the road to faith."

The pope argued that Christianity was a religion of reason, but a reason that was wider than the limited scope of modern science.

For the pope, science reaches its limits when its assumptions can no longer be tested.

"We can't bring 10,000 generations into the laboratory," he said. That leaves "gaps in the possibility of proving or disproving (the theory) by experiment."

However, Pope Benedict said, God cannot be used simply to explain away the problems.

"It's not as if I wanted to stuff dear God into these gaps," he said. "He's too big to fit

into such gaps.”

Pope Benedict also took a firm stand against science books’ tendency to suggest that things came about by nature and evolution.

“The question has to be asked: What is nature or evolution as (an active) subject? It doesn’t exist! If one says that nature does this or that, this can only be an attempt to summarize a series of events under one actor which, as such, doesn’t exist,” the pope said.

Nature and evolution are made up of many individual steps, and the pope insisted that one must look beyond nature and evolution for a guiding principle.

Pope Benedict said science had discovered large areas of rationality and had given people new understanding.

But, he said, “in its joy at the greatness of its discoveries, it has tended to take away from us dimensions of reason which we still need.”

Questions raised have to be answered by reason and “can’t just be left to religious feelings,” said the pope.

Evolution, even if it includes irrational, chaotic and destructive processes, seems to have its own rationality, said the pope. It has adopted the few positive mutations which occurred and exploited the limited possibilities which evolution has offered.

“Where does this rationality come from? Is there a causative rationality?” the pope asked.

“Naturally there is rationality in nature, but that doesn’t allow us to have complete insight into God’s plan,” said Pope Benedict.

He pointed to the “riddle of cruelty in nature” which remains unexplained, even by philosophy. That requires a further step, the step of faith in the Logos, the creative rationality of God himself “which unbelievably was able to become flesh, die and rise again,” he said.