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Benedict's Schulerkreis

John L. Allen Jr. | Sep. 8, 2006 All Things Catholic

Benedict XVI's weekend meeting with his *Schülerkreis*, or circle of formal doctoral students, in Castelgandolfo came and went without the major new statement on evolution that some had rather breathlessly anticipated.

Fr. Joseph Fessio, an American Jesuit who studied under Ratzinger in Germany in the late 1970s, told the Reuters news agency that the group did not talk about creationism or intelligent design, but kept the discussion at a more theoretical level.

Austrian Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, another Ratzinger protégée who spoke at the meeting, announced that its proceedings will be published in German in November. (This will mark the first time that papers from one of the *Schülerkreis* meetings will be published).

Prior to the Sept. 1-3 session, Schönborn delivered two lectures on the theory of evolution in Rimini, Italy, and Alpbach, Austria. In effect, he said the church's problem is not with evolution as a scientific theory but as a philosophy that leaves no room for God.

The Catholic Church, he said in Rimini, does not support "creationism."

Peter Schuster, president of the Austrian Academy of Science and an advocate of evolutionary theory, who spoke at the *Schülerkreis* meeting, told *L'Avvenire* afterwards that it was a "very calm, and above all, very free" discussion.

Schuster said Benedict XVI made it clear that he's interested in the relationship between the church and the sciences, especially biology. Schuster said that criticisms of evolution at Castelgandolfo generally had to do with misapplying it in other fields, such as social theory.

Schuster said he and Schönborn spoke at length, including on the plane back to Vienna. Schuster said Schönborn has shifted his position slightly from a year ago, when an opinion piece by him in the *New York Times* raised doubts about the church's stance on evolution.

It's more clear, Schuster said, that Schönborn is willing to accept the results of science, but he reserves the right to interpret those results in the light of faith.

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