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Pope Benedict XVI's views on evolution are back in the news, following the publication of *Schoepfung und Evolution* (Sankt Ulrich Verlag, 2007), the proceedings of a seminar on creation and evolution that he conducted at Castel Gandolfo, the pope's summer residence, with his former doctoral students in September 2006. Reuters (April 11, 2007) [reports](#) [4], that in his contribution to the book, the Pope "did not endorse creationist or 'intelligent design' views about life's origins," adding, "In the book, Benedict defended what is known as 'theistic evolution,' the view held by Roman Catholic, Orthodox and mainline Protestant churches that God created life through evolution and religion and science need not clash over this."

But Reuters also reported that the Pope regards evolution as unamenable to scientific proof; the Associated Press (April 12, 2007) [quoted](#) [5] him as saying, "the theory of evolution is not a complete, scientifically proven theory," in part because of the length of time involved: "We cannot haul 10,000 generations into the laboratory." Asked for comment by *Der Spiegel* (April 12, 2007), the evolutionary biologist Josef Reichholf [replied](#) [6], "So there would be no history, too, since one can't completely reconstruct it either," and cited archaeology as a historical discipline in which knowledge is attainable despite gaps in the archeological record.

Speculation about a possible shift in the Catholic Church's attitude toward evolution was provoked in 2005 with the publication in *The New York Times* of Cardinal Christoph Schoenborn's op-ed "Finding Design in Nature." By seeming to [express](#) [7] sympathy for "intelligent design" creationism, Schoenborn's op-ed elicited a strong reaction from a host of [scientists](#) [8] -- including Francisco Ayala, Lawrence M. Krauss, Kenneth R. Miller, Fiorenzo Facchini, George V. Coyne (then the director of the Vatican Observatory), and Nicola Cabibbo (the head of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences) -- as well as from a number of Catholic [theologians](#) [9] such as John F. Haught.

NCSE's executive director Eugenie C. Scott commented, "The Pope giveth and the Pope taketh away." It was gratifying, she explained, that there were no signs of the Pope's embracing creationism in any form, and that he expressed such a high view of science. "But it is disquieting," she added, "that his reported comments manifest a misunderstanding of the scientific status of evolution. No scientific theory is 'complete' and 'scientifically proven', but scientists accept theories when the evidence is strong enough - and the evidence for evolution is overwhelming."

Similarly, Scott said that the Pope's reported criticism of evolution as not being replicable reflected a common misunderstanding of the nature of science: "Science is not limited just to the laboratory. Biology, like astronomy and geology, is largely a historical science, but it is no less a science for that." (She added, mischievously, that microbiologists like [Richard Lenski](#) [10] would be surprised to hear that 10,000 generations can't be hauled into the laboratory.) Scott emphasized that her reaction was based on reports from the press, and that she looked forward to reading the Pope's contribution to *Schoepfung und Evolution* to understand his view more completely.

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