

Kansas board, pope challenge evolution: Inroads for intelligent design

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The Kansas State Board of Education approved, in a 6-4 vote, textbook standards that question evolution and redefine science to embrace other than natural explanations.

The next day, Pope Benedict XVI reaffirmed creation as the driving force of the universe, describing the natural world as an “intelligent project” and rejecting scientific thought that regards the history of the universe as random and directionless.

The Kansas school board action and the pope’s remarks on evolution came on November 8 and 9 respectively. The timing was enough to make some scientists wonder whether the pope was attempting to move the church closer to advocates of “intelligent design,” who contend that nature is so complex that it must have been influenced by divine guidance.

“How many people are there today who, fooled by atheism, think and try to demonstrate that it would be scientific to think that everything is without direction and order?” Benedict said during his weekly audience.

The pope described the world as a product of “creative reason, the reason that has created everything, that has created this intelligent project.” Benedict’s remarks came while the Vatican was hosting an international conference to promote understanding between religion and science.

In Topeka, Kansas, dissenting board member Janet Waugh said, “We’re becoming a laughingstock, not only of the nation but of the world.” But board president Steve E. Abrams said, “This is a great day for Kansas.”

National science groups had opposed the state measure, contending that it was an effort to inject religious beliefs into the curriculum. The action made Kansas the fifth state—besides Ohio, Minnesota, New Mexico and Pennsylvania—to adopt guidelines casting doubt on evolutionary theories. The standards adopted by Kansas, though not binding on local school districts, have the most explicit wording of any state’s standards.