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A recently published statement on current scientific knowledge on cosmic evolution and biological evolution from the Pontifical Academy of Sciences concludes: "The extraordinary progress in our understanding of evolution and the place of man in nature should be shared with everyone. ... Furthermore, scientists have a clear responsibility to contribute to the quality of education, especially as regards the subject of evolution." The statement appears in the [proceedings](#) [4] of "Scientific Insights into the Evolution of the Universe and of Life," a plenary session of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences held from October 31 to November 4, 2008.

Nobel laureate Christian de Duve summarized the plenary session: "The participants unanimously accepted as indisputable the affirmation that the Universe, as well as life within it, are the products of long evolutionary histories," noting that there was also wide agreement among the participants on the common ancestry of life on earth. "Evolution," he added, "has acquired the status of established fact. In the words of His Holiness John Paul II, it is 'more than a hypothesis'." The centrality of natural selection to evolution was also recognized, although de Duve acknowledged "the need to refine some of the conceptual bases" of natural selection "in the light of recent findings."

"On the other hand," De Duve added, "no one, at least among the scientists, defended the recently advocated theory of 'intelligent design' ... Several of the arguments cited in support of this theory were shown to ignore recent findings. In particular, the theory was rejected as intrinsically non-disprovable, resting, as it does, on the *a priori* contention, neither provable nor disprovable, that certain events cannot be naturally explained. These views did not satisfy some theologians who stressed the role of design in creation, an affirmation which, in turn, raised the questions of where and how design is manifested. The issue was not settled during the meeting."

"Intelligent design" was also the topic of Maxine Singer's contribution to the plenary session. Singer

traced the history of the antievolution movement in the United States, from Scopes-era attempts to ban the teaching of evolution, through the *McLean*, *Edwards*, and *Kitzmiller* cases, to the present spate of "academic freedom" bills such as Louisiana's, which "permits teachers to speak of evolution as 'controversial' and is an invitation to teachers to present alternative, nonscientific explanations." She added, "The young governor of Louisiana, Bobby Jindal, signed the bill, making it law although he had been a biology major at Brown University."

"Intelligent design is one of the more recent subterfuges used to try to get creationist idea into school science curricula," Singer explained. Its proponents "say their methods are scientific. But they do not describe experiments or systematic observations and do not publish in recognized, peer-reviewed journals." In the face of resistance to evolution exemplified by "creation science" and "intelligent design," Singer concluded, "we are unlikely to convince those who view their religious faith as in fundamental conflict with scientific evolution. ... The most important task for scientists and the only one that has a chance to succeed is assuring that science and evolution are taught properly in school science classes."

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