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The Right Religion or Religious Rights: An American Contradiction

For a nation founded on pilgrims escaping religious persecution claiming a separation of church and state, religion runs deep in America and its bureaucracy. Even the first truly “American” document—the Declaration of Independence—makes multiple references to “God” and “the Creator.” Furthermore, every morning, millions of children pledge allegiance to a nation “under God” in their government-funded public schools. This dichotomy between ideals and implementation of a non-theocratic power raises many questions about whether the majority religion, Christianity, should be held to some validity in public schools. However, the same idea can be proved to be tenuous when regarding that an implementation of religion in public schools may very well be a violation of the First Amendment. One notable manifestation of this issue occurred in 2005, when the Kansas School Board decided that Christian Intelligent Design should be taught alongside evolution in science classes. To combat this claim, writer and activist Bobby Henderson used satire as a medium in “Open Letter to the Kansas School Board (2006)” to convey the absurdity of the Board’s rulings by pointing out the logical flaws in a somewhat comical manner. Throughout the piece, Henderson uses satirical techniques in his creation of a parody religion—Pastafarianism—to render the learning of Intelligent Design in public schools absurd, thereby persuading the Kansas School Board against teaching its students the creation of the world from a Christian view in the same regard as evolution.

To point out the flaws in the argument for Intelligent Design, Henderson ironically

alludes to common Christian beliefs as he urges the School Board to understand the lack of substance in the claims for Intelligent Design. Henderson creates a parody religion, known as Pastafarianism, where the Creator is named the Flying Spaghetti Monster, and becomes a proponent for the religion being taught in schools as well. His invention of a God made of pasta is a strong appeal to burlesque, illustrating how a slightly different view of religion leaves it unreasonable. He even includes a hand drawn representation of the figure with squiggly lines being its “Noodly Appendages”, two crab-like eyes, and two large meatballs “creating a mountain, trees, and a midget,” (Henderson). The verbal irony of calling an appendage “noodly” or adding “midget” to the list of things God is usually recognized for creating forms a humorous discrepancy between the traditionally venerated view of religion and his comical one. This move to create a parody of religion and use of burlesque is a subtle attack at how ridiculous religion sounds from an outside perspective, supporting his argument against teaching Intelligent Design in an environment that should be based on solid evidence. Additionally, his use of a low quality image that looked like the proud work of a seven-year-old reduces religious idols to nothing but mere scribbles. In this manner, Henderson attacks the credibility of the Christian proponents, making their ideas seem less valid and essentially reducing them to childish and naive figures. Then, he further ridicules religion through the justifications of Pastafarianism. He mentions that the Flying Spaghetti Monster is the true Creator, and follows that statement with proof of his claim: “None of us, of course, were around to see [Creation], but we have written accounts of it. We have several lengthy volumes explaining all details of His power,” (Henderson). Here, Henderson is creating a reversal as he ironically alludes to the Bible, mentioning the “lengthy volumes explaining all His power.” In this way, Henderson points out that in order to support the evidence for Christianity and the teaching of it, they must also be supporting Pastafarianism, thus

compelling the Board to reconsider their own logic. Henderson employs more burlesque as well as reductio ad absurdum as he states that Pastafarianism must be taught in “His chosen outfit, which of course is full pirate regalia...The concise explanation is that He becomes angry if we don’t,” (Henderson). The constant use of “His” and “He” also add another layer of irony: while those terms were traditionally meant to display respect for a higher power, he utilizes them to exalt a glorified bowl of pasta to the same status, further belittling the claims of the Board and its supporters. Then, the burlesque of “full pirate regalia” makes any sort of outfit enforced by religion seem absurd, corroborating his attacks against the Board. Additionally, his explanation that “He becomes angry if we don’t” critiques Christians’ beliefs of living in a way to not anger their own God, further widening the separation between science and faith. Ultimately, Henderson’s ironic parody religion works as an indirect medium to criticize Christian logic, pushing the Kansas School Board to acknowledge that Intelligent Design should not be held to the same caliber as evolution.

After creating an alternate and absurd analogy to Christianity, Henderson reverses the normal views on evolution in order to stress the idiocy of teaching Intelligent Design as a science. He starts off by directly invalidating evolution as a whole: “We feel strongly that the overwhelming scientific evidence pointing towards evolutionary processes is nothing but a coincidence, put in place by Him,” (Henderson). By mentioning that even though there is “overwhelming scientific evidence” for evolution yet many religious people believe it is “nothing but a coincidence,” Henderson utilizes situational irony to point out the blatantly flawed logic that substantiated the School Board’s push for Intelligent Design. He then plays on many religious arguments against the scientific evidence of evolution and that “these people don’t understand [that] He built the world to make us think the earth is older than it really is,”

(Henderson). By saying “these people,” he is degrading those who believe in evolution, thus devaluing and belittling the ideas of evolution and science as a whole, a subject that is commonly venerated. Then, he mimics the common religious sentiment of God altering humans’ perception of the world to draw his audience in and relate to their beliefs . He follows this statement by contrasting this real religious belief with an absurd explanation: “what our scientist does not realize is that every time he makes a measurement, the Flying Spaghetti Monster is there changing the results with His Noodly Appendage,” (Henderson). Here, Henderson creates an incongruity as he uses a “Noodly Appendage” —a colloquial and laughable term— to describe results in actual science, proving how ridiculous Intelligent Design sounds from a third party perspective. This use of burlesque degrades the value of the Theory of Intelligent Design as whole—by making his satirical viewpoint absurd, he forces readers to accept that the opposite of his view—evolution—to be the one logical explanation. Overall, Henderson’s absurd degradation of evolution forces the Board to realize that they do not truly have evidence against the theory and must uphold its scientific value in schools.

As Henderson creates a parallel to religious beliefs, he ironically employs logos and statistical evidence in order to point out the flawed “evidence” provided for Intelligent Design. Towards, the beginning of the piece, he directly attacks the School Board’s justification for Intelligent Design through an appeal to logos: “If the Intelligent Design theory is not based on faith, but instead another scientific theory, as is claimed, then you must also allow our theory to be taught, as it is also based on science, not on faith,” (Henderson). By drawing a parallel between the “scientific” Intelligent Design and his absurd parody religion, Henderson undermines the School Board’s claims, thus showing the unjustness of only teaching one type of Intelligent Design in school. Henderson also creates an incongruity by mentioning actual

scientific analysis as compared to obviously illogical evidence. He describes the process for carbon dating—“approximately 75% of the Carbon-14 has decayed by electron emission to Nitrogen-14, and [the scientist] infers that this artifact is approximately 10,000 years old, as the half-life of Carbon-14 appears to be 5,730 years” —and then rebuts its results by explaining that the Flying Spaghetti Monster is “invisible and can pass through normal matter with ease” and alters the results with his “Noodly Appendage” (Henderson). His initial use of statistical evidence and actual scientific diction juxtapose his alternative explanation based on beliefs that can not be corroborated with any observable evidence; this drastic disparity in logic between scientific and faith based theories of human origin emphasizes the idiocy of the School Board’s intent to teach Intelligent Design at the same scientific value as evolution. Henderson further ridicules the Board’s claims that Intelligent Design is “scientific” by creating an absurd graph of “the approximate number of pirates versus the average global temperature over the last 200 years” and claiming that “there is a statistically significant inverse relationship between pirates and global temperature” (Henderson) to show that pirates and Pastafarianism control climate change. By taking blatantly misinterpreted—or even fully falsified—data and claiming that it holds deep scientific value, Henderson attacks the “scientific” reasoning for teaching Intelligent Design. Furthermore, the graph displays how easily information can be misconstrued to create false support for a claim, calling readers to think more critically about the media they consume. Henderson’s repeated appeals to logos as a manner to highlight the difference between real and religious science impels the Board to consider the validity of their reasoning.

To underline the absurdity of the ruling to teach Intelligent Design alongside evolution in public schools by the Kansas School Board, Henderson employs rhetorical and satirical devices as he creates an analogy with his parody religion, Pastafarianism. His letter calls out the

tenuousness of the Board's justification for teaching religious ideas as a science in nondenominational public schools. Additionally, he highlights the unjustness of teaching just one religion in a country where freedom of religion is a right; if religion is to be taught in a government funded institution, then all religions must be included to allow students the freedom of having their own beliefs. Moreover, his letter attacks not just the Kansas School Board, but the omnipresence of Christianity in the American government as well as Americans who believe faith equates to science. He warns that if society treats faith as fact, there will be no way to truly innovate and grow as a whole, leaving America to plateau in a self-contradictory plight.

Work Cited

Henderson, Bobby. "Open Letter to the Kansas School Board (2006)." *Official Church of the FSM*, 2006, <https://www.spaghettimonster.org/pages/about/open-letter/>. Accessed 12 December 2025.