

Emerson Unitarian Church Guest Sermon – January 1, 2006  
What Would The Flying Spaghetti Monster Do?

Kevin:

Why are we here? What is the meaning of the existence of humans on Earth? Of course as Unitarian Universalists, we revel in asking these kinds of questions. Often the fruits of our queries include more questions than answers. But, they are fruits, nonetheless. They nourish our intellectual and spiritual curiosity, because the search for truth can be as satisfying as the discovery.

UUism as a movement thrives on the embrace of differing faith traditions. Christianity in its many and varied forms is, of course, one of our beloved faiths. Others include Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, earth-based religions, and humanism. Our heritage as Christians teaches us to root for the underdog. For example, I want to quote from a recent Watchtower Society publication, of the Jehovah's Witnesses. In this 3-page article, Unitarians are painted as tolerant and forward thinking. The 16th century kingdom of John Sigismund in Transylvania is said to have been an "island of tolerance in a sea of intolerance". This in reference to the persecution of those that disagreed with the religious precept of the trinity.

Our world is truly a delightful, and curious, and strange place to explore. Imagine, a liberal Unitarian Universalist discovering a Jehovah's Witness magazine with an insightful and historically accurate rendition of the Unitarian church in Transylvania as it existed about 600 years ago. Who'd 've thunk it? And the Jehovah's Witness author praises our Unitarian forefathers for the radical tolerance that modern Unitarian Universalists hold as one of our most significant principles. The fact that the particular Watchtower magazine to which we refer was discovered in a Laundromat in Stafford, TX adds a delicious icing to our serendipitous cake.

So, what's the point? Tolerance is the point. And, it is often easier to say than to do. Nonetheless, we must walk our UU talk, we must consider other religious points-of-view with an open mind and an open heart. Today we bring to you a brand-new religious movement - a movement born of necessity; a movement that teaches us all what is at stake in the modern culture war being waged against the peaceful coexistence of faith and reason. So, steel yourselves.

What you hear today will shock you. It will move you. And when all is said and done. You will ask yourself: What would the Flying Spaghetti Monster do?

Just as there are members of our congregation that consider themselves Christian and those that consider themselves humanist, and every other combination -- some among us have already joined the ranks of this brand new religious movement.

In recent years, state boards of education, local school districts, and biology teachers have been under pressure to include other descriptions for how life on Earth came to be as rich and varied as we see today. In Kansas, for example, one idea was to include space for Intelligent Design in the state science curriculum, as an alternative to evolution.

Then, came the prophet Bobby Henderson. He was touched by the noodly appendage and inspired to write an open letter to the Kansas Board of Education. Our prophet Bobby's letter was the spark that ignited a passionate spiritual flame that now spreads like wildfire and burns with a white-hot determination to protect fairness and equality in the teaching of religion as science. Some call it Pastafarianism. And, most of its followers agree that unlike other popular world faiths, it goes quite well with marinara sauce and garlic. Ramen, baby.

Jimmy and I, and many others at Emerson are new converts to this faith, so in the interest of quality assurance, we called upon one of our Pastafarian brothers to share his wisdom and passion for Flying Spaghetti Monsterism. I present to you, our pirate brother: Disembowlin' Velvet Claw of Tolerance.  
CHRIS aka Disembowlin' Velvet Claw of Tolerance

#### OPEN LETTER TO KANSAS SCHOOL BOARD:

I am writing you with much concern after having read of your hearing to decide whether the alternative theory of Intelligent Design should be taught along with the theory of Evolution. I think we can all agree that it is important for students to hear multiple viewpoints so they can choose for themselves the theory that makes the most sense to them. I am concerned, however, that students will only hear one theory of Intelligent Design.

Let us remember that there are multiple theories of Intelligent Design. I and many others around the world are of the strong belief that the universe was created by a Flying Spaghetti Monster. It was He who created all that we see and all that we feel. We feel strongly that the overwhelming scientific evidence pointing towards evolutionary processes is nothing but a coincidence, put in place by Him.

It is for this reason that I'm writing you today, to formally request that this alternative theory be taught in your schools, along with the other two theories. In fact, I will go so far as to say, if you do not agree to do this, we will be forced to proceed with legal action. I'm sure you see where we are coming from. 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.

Some find that hard to believe, so it may be helpful to tell you a little more about our beliefs. We have evidence that a Flying Spaghetti Monster created the universe. None of us, of course, were around to see it, but we have written accounts of it. We have several lengthy volumes explaining all details of His power. Also, you may be surprised to hear that there are over 10 million of us, and growing. We tend to be very secretive, as many people claim our beliefs are not substantiated by observable evidence. What these people don't understand is that He built the world to make us think the earth is older than it really is. For example, a scientist may perform a carbon-dating process on an artifact. He finds that approximately 75% of the Carbon-14 has decayed by electron emission to Nitrogen-14, and infers that this artifact is approximately 10,000 years old, as the half-life of Carbon-14 appears to be 5,730 years. But 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. We have numerous texts that describe in detail how this can be possible and the reasons why He does this. He is of course invisible and can pass through normal matter with ease.

I'm sure you now realize how important it is that your students are taught this alternate theory. It is absolutely imperative that they realize that observable evidence is at the discretion of a Flying Spaghetti Monster. Furthermore, it is disrespectful to teach our beliefs without wearing His chosen outfit, which of course is full pirate regalia. I cannot stress the importance of this enough, and unfortunately cannot describe in detail why this must be done as I fear this letter is already becoming too long. The concise explanation is that He becomes angry if we don't. You may be interested to know that global warming, earthquakes, hurricanes, and other natural disasters are a direct effect of the shrinking numbers of Pirates since the 1800s. For your interest, I have included a graph of the approximate number of pirates versus the average global temperature over the last 200 years. As you can see, there is a statistically significant inverse relationship between pirates and global temperature.

In conclusion, thank you for taking the time to hear our views and beliefs. I hope I was able to convey the importance of teaching this theory to your students. We will of course be able to train the teachers in this alternate theory. I am eagerly awaiting your response, and hope dearly that no legal action will need to be taken. I think we can all look forward to the time when these three theories are given equal time in our science classrooms across the country, and eventually the world; One third time for Intelligent Design, one third time for Flying Spaghetti Monsterism, and one third time for logical conjecture based on overwhelming observable evidence.  
Sincerely Yours,

Bobby Henderson, concerned citizen.

P.S. I have included an artistic drawing of Him creating a mountain, trees, and a midget. Remember, we are all His creatures.

KEVIN

Thank you, my pirate brother, Disembowlin' Velvet Claw of Tolerance. This is the new religion that some call Pastafarianism and some just call Flying Spaghetti Monsterism. It is one creation story among many. It is directed at those that would use only Christianity's creation story to counter evolution.

You heard in the letter to the school board a mention of Intelligent Design. This is a modern movement to put a scientific face on an older and more familiar movement -- Creationism. Intelligent Design is a movement to replace science with pseudoscience. The real goal of this distinctly American-born movement is to push aside what is seen as the Godless theory of evolution from America's classrooms and replace it with an evangelical Judeo-Christian view of God's Creation as the description for the wonder that is the endless variety and complexity that is life on Earth. The idea of Intelligent Design is to say that some parts of our universe are too complex to have evolved. These things must have been designed.

This Intelligent Design movement is orchestrated by the Discovery Institute which is a Seattle-based conservative Christian think tank. The attack on evolution will first challenge its soundness as a scientific theory, and then replace it with Intelligent Design.

The first part is in the form a PR campaign called "Teach the Controversy." This campaign is aimed at public school districts and urges teachers to show students the flaws Darwin's theory. The entire argument against evolution focuses on gaps in the current evolutionary models -- gaps that will likely one day be filled if the pattern of scientific development is to be trusted at all.

Intelligent Design is not science. In modern science, a theory must have reproducible experiments and be exposed to the often-pitiless world of peer-review by a well-established scientific journal. According to the National Center for Science Education, only one Intelligent Design article has been published and even then, the journal that published the article promptly retracted it. The journal also put out a statement that said "there is no credible scientific evidence supporting Intelligent Design as a testable hypothesis to explain the origin of organic diversity."

JIMMY

So who is the Intelligent Designer? Well the supporters of Intelligent Design are agnostic in that area. They say, it could be God, a superior alien race, or perhaps a time-traveler.

In a recent article in "Live Science" the real intentions of the Discovery Institute are made more clear:

"The objective is to convince people that Darwinism is inherently atheistic, thus shifting the debate from creationism vs. evolution to the existence of God vs. the nonexistence of God," wrote Phillip Johnson, the original creator of the Intelligent Design movement, in a 1999 article for Church and State magazine. "From there, people are introduced to 'the truth' of the Bible and then 'the question of sin' and finally 'introduced to Jesus.'"

Also in 1999, a fund raising document used by the Discovery Institute was leaked to the public. Informally known as the "Wedge Document," it stated that the center's long-term goals were nothing less than the "overthrow of materialism and its cultural legacies," and the replacement of "materialistic explanations with the theistic understanding that nature and human beings are created by God."

The means for achieving these goals was explained using a simple metaphor: "If we view the predominant materialistic science as a giant tree, our strategy is intended to function as a 'wedge' that, while relatively small, can split the trunk when applied at its weakest points."

In a 1999 interview with Insight Magazine, Johnson explained why he singled out evolution when his real target was all of modern science: "Evolution is a creation story and as a creation story, it's the main prop of the materialist explanation for our existence."

Barbara Forrest is a philosopher at Southeastern Louisiana University and she compares Intelligent Design to the Trojan horse.

"They know that if you can get Intelligent Design into a school, you're going to have some teacher who's going to present it as religious creationism. They know that, but they can't admit that until they get their foot in the door of the classroom."

There are two parts to the supposed science behind Intelligent Design. One is called "irreducible complexity" and says some things in the natural world such as bacterial flagella are too complex to simply have evolved. The idea is that once a thing is thought to fit this complexity model, there is no need to attempt further science. It must be the signature of the designer. The idea that only in the flagella of bacteria can one find the hand of God leaves many of us reeling to be sure.

The second piece of the Intelligent Design model is called "specified complexity". The idea here is that something like DNA that not only is complex but has a specific purpose must show the work of an Intelligent Designer. For example, the letter A is specific but isn't complex; a string a random letters is complex but has no specific meaning. But a work of Shakespeare is both complex and has some inherent meaning and therefore shows that an Intelligent Designer was at work to create it.

Again, the idea is that no more attempts to explain the origins of DNA are necessary if we can all agree that it is the work of an Intelligent Designer.

The problem is that these two pillars of Intelligent Design carry science into the world of religion. Science and religion address different problems and offer different solutions. If the answer to the questions we have about anything complicated or interesting is as simple as they are part of the Intelligent Designer's plan, then why ask the questions at all.

In recent months, in Dover Pennsylvania, a federal district court heard a case about Intelligent Design. It seems that some of the local school board members were moved by the arguments of Intelligent Design and thought it was time for evolution and creationism to have equal footing in local schools. A policy was enacted whereby biology teachers in public schools in Dover would to have to read a disclaimer regarding evolution and the teaching of Intelligent Design.

Here is some of what the disclaimer says:

...Because Darwin's Theory is a theory, it continues to be tested as new evidence is discovered. The Theory is not a fact. Gaps in the Theory exist for which there is no evidence. ... Intelligent Design is an explanation of the origin of life that differs from Darwin's view. ... With respect to any theory, students are encouraged to keep an open mind. ...

So what's wrong with that? Keeping an open mind sounds good. It is clearly something that Unitarian Universalists can embrace. So, what's all the hubbub, bub? Here is where the Flying Spaghetti Monster rears His noodly head. Why can't we just insert ANY creation story into the science classroom? After all, evolution is not a fact. Evolution has gaps. And most importantly, if Intelligent Design is not science, then why should it get preferential treatment? What about Zeus? What about Purusha and the Hindu creation story? And, what about the Flying Spaghetti Monster of Pastafarianism? Why one and only one non-scientific model for creation? Students should at least get a lesson in comparative religion if we are going to push religion into biology class.

The implication is that evolution is somehow an anti-religious model, one that kills God and removes humans from the center of the story. As a Unitarian Universalist, I would be the first to argue that having a firm base in logic and reason and therefore science does not preclude one from being religious. In fact, most scientists that call themselves believers don't agree that evolution has the potential to destroy religion.

Why can't evolution and a belief in one faith tradition or another peacefully coexist for a reasonable person in today's world? For many, many scientists, faith and the work they do are not at odds. In fact, their faith often creates their passion to use science to reveal the mind of God and to improve the condition of God's creatures.

One of the witnesses in the Dover trial was Dr. Kenneth Miller. Doctor Miller is an active member of the modern evolutionary biology community. He is also a devout Roman Catholic. He went to Dover to speak out against Intelligent Design on the grounds that science never leaves the gaps unfilled willfully. A conscience effort is always going on to fill those gaps. That is the way of Science.

But Dr. Miller also doesn't think evolution is proof that God isn't real. In a recent book titled "Finding Darwin's God," Dr. Miller said:

"So how is a random, chance, process like evolution consistent with the will of a Creator? As physicist and religious scholar Ian Barbour, the author of a dozen books on science and religion, puts it: 'Natural laws and chance may equally be instruments of God's intentions. There can be purpose without an exact predetermined plan.'

To a believer, the world makes sense, human actions have a certain value, and there is a moral order to the universe. The irony is that only those who embrace the scientific reality of evolution are adequately prepared to give God the credit and the power He truly deserves. By recognizing the continuing force of evolution, a religious person acknowledges that God is every bit as creative in the present as He was in the past. ... A strong and self-confident religious belief cannot forever pin its hopes on the desperate supposition that an entire branch of science is dramatically wrong, thereby to teeter always on the brink of logical destruction. To be sure, genuine faith requires from its adherents a trust in God, but it also demands a confidence in the power of the human mind to investigate, explore, and understand the evolving nature of God's world."

So it seems the Intelligent Design movement wants people to look for the "God of the gaps" in scientific knowledge. The underlying motive of the Intelligent Design movement is to bring people closer to God, yet they have unwittingly handed those that wish to destroy God the perfect weapon.

Dr. Miller makes this very clear in the following statement:

"If a lack of scientific explanation is proof of God's existence, the counterlogic is unimpeachable: a successful scientific explanation is an argument against God. ...

... There is neither logical nor theological basis for excluding God's use of natural processes to originate species, ourselves included. There is therefore no reason for believers to draw a line in the sand between God and Darwin. The opponents of evolution have put their money on the wrong horse, and they fail to see that betting so consistently against science is a losing proposition -- not for science, but certainly for religion.

As a Christian, [Dr. Miller] find[s] the flow of their logic particularly depressing. Not only does it teach us to fear the acquisition of knowledge, which might at any time disprove belief, but it suggests that God dwells only in the shadows of our understanding. [Dr. Miller] suggest[s] that if God is real, we should be able to find Him somewhere else -- in the bright light of human knowledge, spiritual and scientific.

Each of the great Western monotheistic traditions sees God as truth, love, and knowledge. Each and every increase in our understanding of the natural world should be a step towards God, and not, as many people assume, a step away.

Understanding evolution and its description of the processes that gave rise to the modern world is an important part of knowing and appreciating God. ... True knowledge comes only from a combination of faith and reason."

So how did the Dover case turn out? Judge Jones, who is a conservative republican, and an appointee of George W. Bush, had this to say about the mandatory reading of a disclaimer to biology students in Dover, regarding evolution and Intelligent Design:

While encouraging students to keep an open mind and explore alternatives to evolution, it offers no scientific alternative; instead, the only alternative offered is an inherently religious one... Whether a student accepts the Board's invitation to explore ... and [read] a creationist text, or follows the Board's other suggestion and discusses "Origins of Life" with family members, that objective student can reasonably infer that the District's favored view is a religious one, and that the District is accordingly sponsoring a form of religion. ...

To be sure, Darwin's theory of evolution is imperfect. However, the fact that a scientific theory cannot yet render an explanation on every point should not be used as a pretext to thrust an untestable alternative hypothesis grounded in religion into the science classroom or to misrepresent well-established scientific propositions.

The citizens of the Dover area were poorly served by the members of the Board who voted for the Intelligent Design Policy. ...

With that said, we do not question that many of the leading advocates of Intelligent Design have bona fide and deeply held beliefs which drive their scholarly endeavors. Nor do we controvert that Intelligent Design should continue to be studied, debated, and discussed. As stated, our conclusion today is that it is unconstitutional to teach Intelligent Design as an alternative to evolution in a public school science classroom.

In the end, Judge Jones was not moved by the Intelligent Design model as an alternative to evolution. Nor was he convinced that Intelligent Design is science. Our founding fathers were clever in designing a society with a clear and mandated separation of church and state. This separation is essential for the protection of all our nation's religions, regardless of the feelings of the religious majority. The notion that one religion is right and the others are wrong is not a part of the separation of church and state. In the book "The Power of Myth" Joseph Campbell had this to say about our nation:

"This is the first nation in the world that was ever established on the basis of reason instead of simply warfare. They were eighteenth-century deists, these gentlemen. [On the great seal of the United States] we read, "In God We Trust." But that is not the god of the Bible. These men did not believe in a Fall. They did not think the mind of man was cut off from God. The mind of man, cleansed of secondary and merely temporal concerns, beholds with the radiance of a cleansed mirror a reflection of the rational mind of God. Reason puts you in touch with God. Consequently, for these men, there is no special revelation anywhere, and none is needed."

KEVIN

It is ironic that the victory of science over Intelligent Design in Dover, PA was decided by a pious, faithful, and conservative Christian judge, but this event is much more powerful than a story of irony or victory, or even a better understanding of science and evolution, intelligent design and mysticism, and the separation of church and state.

There can be no doubt that Judge Jones was very aware of how he would be regarded by many fundamentalist Christians when he revealed his decisions and their supporting arguments. He obviously understood that the precedent set by his findings would have an impact on the entire country. And, he must have also understood that the same people who were able to rationalize Intelligent Design into science and by doing so, attempt to employ Intelligent Design to teach their faith in public schools, would not care about how or why he arrived at his conclusions. So, what we see in Judge Jones is an upright Christian citizen, who is not afraid to separate his faith from his moral and ethical obligation to uphold Constitutional law, and in doing so protect the religious freedom of all the people and all the religions in his judicial district, and beyond. He serves as a shining example for his fellow Christians, and as a powerful reminder for Unitarian Universalists that there are many faithful Christians who deserve our respect, our appreciation, and our tolerance.

We started out using the Flying Spaghetti Monster as a foil for the unraveling of the bad science and bad religion of Intelligent Design. Flying Spaghetti Monsterism shows us how incompetent and weak is the God of Intelligent Design. Now it is up to us to ensure that science and religion aren't co-opted by those that don't care for truth, particularly when it gets in the way of their faith.

And now, lest we forget, are a few words on the subject from Charles Darwin:

With respect to the theological view of the question. This is always painful to me. I am bewildered. I had no intention to write atheistically. But I own that I cannot see as plainly as others do, and as I should wish to do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world.

In the last paragraph of "On the Origin of the Species" Charles Darwin wrote these words:

"It is interesting to contemplate a tangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent upon each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us. ... Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved."