

# Pastafarianism

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**ABSTRACT:** Pastafarianism (also known as the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster) is a recent cultural movement. Its adherents declare that Pastafarianism is a legitimate religion. They declare that it is not a joke, satire, parody, or thought experiment. Yet the Honorable John Gerrard, a judge in the US District Court for Nebraska, has ruled that Pastafarianism is merely a parody, and so does not deserve legal recognition. I argue that Pastafarianism shares so many features with legally recognized religions that it both is a religion and deserves legal recognition in the United States. I draw on theology, the legal recognition of the Mormon and Hopi religions, and recent case law.

## 1. Introduction

Pastafarianism began when Bobby Henderson wrote a satirical letter in 2005 to the Kansas Board of Education protesting their efforts to teach Christian intelligent design. His letter proposed an alternative to both evolution and Christian intelligent design, namely, that the world and all living things were designed and created by an intelligent Flying Spaghetti Monster. Hence Pastafarianism is also known as the *Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster*. The Monster itself (the FSM) consists of two eyes perched above two meatballs surrounded by a mass of pasta noodles. The FSM plays much the same role in Pastafarianism as God does in the Abrahamic religions.

After his letter to the Kansas Board garnered great media attention, Henderson continued his development of Pastafarianism by writing *The Gospel of the Flying Spaghetti Monster* (2006; hereafter, *The Gospel*). While some of *The Gospel* involves a humorous parody of Christian intelligent design, most of it does not.<sup>1</sup> Most of *The Gospel* involves serious discussion of practices and ideas which appear to be religious rather than merely secular. *The Gospel* frequently and seriously refers to Pastafarianism as a religion.<sup>2</sup> It likewise frequently and seriously refers to the FSM as a god or deity.<sup>3</sup> Besides *The Gospel*, Pastafarianism is propagated via the official church internet site *venganza.org* as well as many other internet sites, Facebook groups, meet-ups, and so on.

Although it is a very recent cultural development, Pastafarianism has grown with great rapidity.<sup>4</sup> It claims members in many nations around the globe. It has evolved far beyond *The Gospel* and has spawned a wide ranging system of practices and beliefs. Its adherents insist that it is not a joke, satire, parody, or thought experiment (Henderson, 2016a).<sup>5</sup> They insist that Pastafarianism is a genuine religion. Pastafarians insist that its

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<sup>1</sup>Although *The Gospel* has 166 pages, only page 1-37 and 108-12 explicitly deal with Christian intelligent design. Most of *The Gospel* is concerned with defining and defending the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster.

<sup>2</sup>Pastafarianism is explicitly referred to as a religion in Henderson (2006) xi, xiv, 26, 27, 28, 64, 65, 94, 98, 99, 122, 165, 166.

<sup>3</sup>The FSM is explicitly referred to as a god, as God, or as the Creator in *The Gospel*, xiv, 30, 79, 140-3, 155. The story of the FSM as the Creator is given in 40-3, 51-6, 70-9. The FSM is treated as a divine designer-creator in 127-64.

<sup>4</sup>Pastafarianism has seen almost no scholarly discussion. Cusack (2010: 132-9) discusses it briefly. Apart from Cusack, searches of JSTOR, Google Scholar, and the Dartmouth Library collective database system reveal no substantive literature on it.

<sup>5</sup>The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster was founded by Bobby Henderson. He writes: "Some claim that the church is purely a thought experiment or satire, illustrating

legitimacy as a religion is equivalent to that of every other religion. Thus if Christianity is a religion, then so is Pastafarianism. They claim that Pastafarians deserve the same legal rights as any other religions (Henderson, 2006: 165). Thus if Christians have special legal rights, then Pastafarians deserve those same rights.

However, the religious legitimacy of Pastafarianism is often challenged. Tremlett refers to it as a fake religion (2014: 118). More recently, the Honorable John Gerrard, a judge in a US District Court, has ruled that Pastafarianism is not a religion (Gerrard, 2016).<sup>6</sup> Against those claims, I will argue that the Pastafarians are right: *Pastafarianism is a religion*. Importantly, I employ no definition of religion.<sup>7</sup> Definitions of religion are both philosophically and legally problematic.<sup>8</sup> My argument is inductive: I point out that Pastafarianism shares so many features with legally recognized religions that it is both a religion and that it deserves legal recognition. Since Gerrard includes the features used in *Africa v. Pennsylvania* (662 F.2d 1025), I will also include those features and indicate that Pastafarianism has them. Since the Meyers Factors (*United States v. Meyers*, 906 F. Supp. 1494 (D. Wyo. 1995)) are based on *Africa*, I will not address them specifically. If it satisfies *Africa*, then it is easy to infer that Pastafarianism satisfies *Meyers*.

## 2. Pastafarianism and Religious Practices

Pastafarianism involves public displays of community symbols; these displays are the same as to the public displays of community symbols made by legally recognized religions. Just as Jews wear *kippah* skullcaps and Muslims wear *taqiya* skullcaps, so Pastafarians wear colanders. Mormons wear temple garments (special underwear) and members of other religions wear robes or other special garments. Just so, Pastafarians dress like pirates to indicate group membership. Just as Christians wear crucifixes, so Pastafarians wear FSM necklaces. Public displays of community symbols is widely acknowledged to be a sign of sincere religious commitment. On this point, Pastafarianism is exactly like many legally recognized religions.

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that Intelligent Design is not science, just a pseudoscience manufactured by Christians to push Creationism into public schools. These people are mistaken — The Church of FSM is legit, and backed by hard science. Anything that comes across as humor or satire is purely coincidental” (Henderson, 2016a). And he also writes: “It’s not a joke. Elements of our religion are sometimes described as satire and there are many members who do not literally believe our scripture, but this isn’t unusual in religion” (Henderson, 2016a).

<sup>6</sup>Gerrard rules that “The Court finds that FSMism is not a ‘religion’ within the meaning of the relevant federal statutes and constitutional jurisprudence” (2016: 1).

<sup>7</sup>I accept the view that “religion” is a family-resemblance concept. This view has been defended by Harrison (2006) in philosophy and by Penalver (1997) in the law. There is no list of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for being a religion. Hence it is not possible to define religion (Webb, 2009). Rather, religions, like games, and like members of families, involve clusters of features; those clusters overlap; yet there need not be any single cluster shared by all religions; there may be two religions sharing no features in common yet connected by a path of overlapping clusters.

<sup>8</sup>Most definitions of religion regard Protestantism as the paradigmatic religion; hence they are severely biased. They often say religion requires belief in a system of literally and factually true propositions. They cannot conceive of a religion which does not involve belief (because it focuses entirely on practice, or because it is indifferent to the literal truth or falsity of its religious stories). The definition in Clements (1989) the one in *Africa v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (662 F.2d 1025) are biased in this way. All definitions of religion are legally problematic in the US because they appear to violate both the Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses of the First Amendment.

Pastafarianism has members who perform social ceremonies just as other religions have members who perform social ceremonies. Legally recognized religious groups have celebrants who perform weddings. Likewise Pastafarians have celebrants who perform weddings. The first Pastafarian wedding in the world was performed in New Zealand in April 2016 (Zauzmer, 2016). The wedding participants were sincere (e.g. those in the wedding sincerely intended to be married by a Pastafarian celebrant, and they were in fact legally so married). This shows that some Pastafarians sincerely exercise their religious rights when those rights are extended to them by the law.

Pastafarians engage in activities usually associated with legally recognized religions. Just as legally recognized religions perform charitable and philanthropic work, so Pastafarians perform charitable and philanthropic work. The Kiva organization makes interest-free loans to people in impoverished regions which lack financial institutions. One Pastafarian Kiva fund has raised over three million dollars.<sup>9</sup> The First Pastafarian Church of Norman Oklahoma meets in its own building in that city (Mayer, 2016). Pastafarians have holidays such as Pastover and Talk Like a Pirate day. They meet for special communion meals. They ordain ministers. Pastafarians have used their religious symbols in political contexts. A Pastafarian member of the town council in Pomfret, New York, wore a colander while taking the oath of office.<sup>10</sup>

Pastafarians make efforts to propagate Pastafarianism. They have websites; they march in parades. They have set up displays at statehouses in Florida, Michigan, and Wisconsin.<sup>11</sup> They have set up a display at a courthouse in Tennessee.<sup>12</sup> Pastafarians spend time, effort, and money making demands for legal recognition; these demands are identical in nature to demands made by other religions seeking legal recognition. After meeting resistance from the Massachusetts Department of Motor Vehicles, a citizen in Massachusetts who wanted to wear Pastafarian headgear in a drivers license photo sought legal assistance from the American Humanist Association's Appignani Humanist Legal Center.<sup>13</sup> The Massachusetts citizen prevailed. A citizen in Wisconsin retained an attorney to assist him in obtaining a drivers license in which he wore Pastafarian headgear.<sup>14</sup> Citizens in the US states of Georgia, Illinois, and New Jersey have fought for their rights to wear colanders in official drivers license photos. These legal efforts clearly demonstrate sincere commitments to Pastafarian practices, and sincere demands that society grant them rights equal to those of other religions.

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<sup>9</sup>The Pastafarian Kiva fund raised 3.1 million dollars. See <<http://www.venganza.org/2016/04/kiva-3-million/>>. Accessed 16 August 2016.

<sup>10</sup>Christopher Shaeffer was sworn into office on the Town Board of Pomfret, New York, wearing a colander, on 2 January 2014. See <<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/pastafarian-politician-takes-oath-office-wearing-colander-head-article-1.1568877>>. Accessed 17 August 2016.

<sup>11</sup>For the 2015 Michigan display in 2015, see <<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/dec/19/flying-spaghetti-monster-followers-erect-holiday-d/>>. For the 2015 Florida display, see <<https://www.rt.com/usa/325680-flying-spaghetti-monster-florida/>>. For the 2015 Wisconsin display, see <<http://www.ahauwmadison.org/2015/04/flying-spaghetti-monster-back-in.html>>. All accessed 17 August 2016.

<sup>12</sup>For the Tennessee courthouse display in 2008, see <<http://www.cnet.com/news/flying-spaghetti-monster-statue-at-tennessee-courthouse/>>. Accessed 17 August 2016.

<sup>13</sup>See <<http://americanhumanist.org/news/details/2015-11-massachusetts-pastafarian-wins-right-to-wear-a-colan>>. Accessed 17 August 2016.

<sup>14</sup>To obtain his drivers license, Michael Schumacher retained the services of attorney Derek Allen (of Shannon Law Office, LLC, in Evansville WI). Mr. Allen wrote a letter to the WI DMV dated 25 January 2016. See <<http://www.venganza.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2016-1-25-Letter-to-DMV-1.pdf>>. Accessed 15 August 2016.

Pastafarian practices are legally accepted in many jurisdictions in the United States. The states of California, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin permit residents to wear colanders as religious headgear in drivers license photos. This shows that some officials will grant Pastafarianism legal status in the United States. Since legal assistance was provided in at least the Massachusetts and Wisconsin cases, this shows that some attorneys regard Pastafarianism as deserving legal recognition. Pastafarianism is legally recognized as a religion in the Netherlands and New Zealand.

Judge Gerrard has ruled that Pastafarianism is not a religion; rather, it is “a parody, intended to advance an argument about science, the evolution of life, and the place of religion in public education” (2016: 1). But the activities of Pastafarians listed above (such raising money for Kiva, seeking legal acceptance for headgear and political displays, performing weddings, holding communions, etc.) have nothing to do with “an argument about science, the evolution of life, and the place of religion in public education”. Noah Feldman, Professor of Law at Harvard University, and a specialist in law and religion, writes that “Pastafarianism was born as a parody. But that parody came to be accompanied by rituals, adherents and beliefs. Those are some of the key sociological factors that go into a description of religion” (2016).

Three clusters of religiously salient features are discussed in *Africa v. Pennsylvania*. The third cluster concerns practice: “Third, a religion often can be recognized by the presence of certain formal and external signs” (34). *Africa v. Pennsylvania* expands on this cluster as follows: “A third indicium of a religion is the presence of any formal, external, or surface signs that may be analogized to accepted religions. Such signs might include formal services, ceremonial functions, the existence of clergy, structure and organization, efforts at propagation, observance of holidays and other similar manifestations associated with traditional religions” (48-49). Pastafarianism has all these features. Since it is precisely these features which distinguish religions from philosophies (which rarely dictate special practices), this third cluster has very high religious salience.<sup>15</sup> Because of its system of practices, Pastafarianism has crucial religious features.

### 3. Pastafarianism and Religious Parody

The argument advanced by Judge Gerrard seems to go like this: (1) Pastafarianism is a parody of established religions; (2) Parodies of established religions are not religions; (3) therefore, Pastafarianism is not a religion. Four objections can be advanced against the first premise of this argument. The first objection comes from the Pastafarians themselves. They declare that Pastafarianism is not a parody, satire, or joke. They get married by Pastafarian ministers. But the Pastafarian wedding was not a joke or hoax. It was a real wedding. They spend considerable resources in its defense; but it seems unlikely that somebody would spend such resources in the defense of a joke.

The second objection to the first premise comes from the distinction between *using* parody and *being* parody. The fact that a carpenter uses a hammer does not imply that he is identical with the hammer he uses; the fact that Pastafarianism uses parody does not imply that it is identical with the parody it uses. The use of humor by Pastafarians does not imply that it is a joke or that it cannot be sincerely believed (because its adherents know it to be false). Gerrard writes that “it is no more tenable to read the FSM Gospel as proselytizing for supernatural spaghetti than to read Jonathan Swift’s ‘Modest Proposal’

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<sup>15</sup>It is arguable that special practices distinguish religions from mere philosophies. For example, Epicureanism, Stoicism, Neoplatonism, Confucianism do not have any special practices. Many writers regard these as philosophical but not religious.

as advocating cannibalism” (2016: 10).<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that Swift used parody to call attention to poverty in England and Ireland does not imply that he had no positive views of his own on this issue. On the contrary, he had well-developed policy ideas on exactly that issue (Oakleaf, 2008). Likewise the Pastafarian use of parody does not imply that they have no positive religious doctrines or practices of their own. Much of *The Gospel* consists of serious discussion of religious issues and practices.

The third objection to the first premise comes from the fact that Pastafarianism does not use humor for the merely secular purpose of entertainment; on the contrary, it uses humor for *religious purposes*. These purposes will be discussed below. For now it suffices to mention precedents. On this point there is precedent in Zen Buddhism (Hyers, 1989). Zen Buddhists use humor to teach religious principles (such as detachment from self and world). Zen Buddhists likewise regard humor as a mark of religious enlightenment. On this point there is also precedent in Hopi religion (Wenger, 2005). Many Hopi dances feature clowns who perform ribald comedy. These comedic acts are judged by the Hopi as religious performances. Since the acts of the clowns are often sexually suggestive, Christian missionaries endeavored to use BIA policy to eliminate the dances. Those efforts were ruled to be legally invalid. Analogously, legal efforts to suppress Pastafarian practice because of its humorous nature should also be invalid.

The use of parody for religious purposes has well-established precedent. New religions have parodied the established religions against which they emerged. The Hebrew Prophet Elijah used parody to criticize the religion of Baal (1 Kings 18: 21-40). The Bible tells us that Elijah mocked the prophets of Baal: “At noon Elijah began to taunt them. ‘Shout louder!’ he said. ‘Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.’” (1 Kings 18: 27-28). The great Christian apologist St. Augustine used parody to criticize the Greco-Roman religion (see *City of God*, 6.9). Hobbes used parody to criticize the Catholic Church (*Leviathan*, Part 4, Of the Kingdom of Darkness). But Elijah mocked Baal in order to advance Judaism, St. Augustine mocked the Greco-Roman deities to advance Christianity, and Hobbes used parody to advance Protestantism. Those writers used parody to advance their own religions. Its use served a *religious purpose*. Likewise the Pastafarian use of parody serves the very same religious purpose. Just as the use of parody cannot prevent Judaism or Christianity or Protestantism from being religions (and being legally recognized as such), so also the use of parody cannot prevent Pastafarianism from being a religion (and should not prevent it from being legally recognized as such).

The fourth objection is that allegations of parody are biased. Mormonism appeared to many people to be a parody of Christianity: “As might naturally be expected this parody by the Mormons of the Christian Church has been a great annoyance to the latter” (Beadle & Hollister, 1904: 276). Ampere wrote: “I have read the sacred book of the Mormons”; he then declared “It is an imitation, or rather a parody, of the Old Testament” (1853: 56). Dickenson wrote “The Mormon religion is a parody on the old Hebrew faith” (1885: 202). Speaking of Mormon practices, Sala wrote “The heart of the Christian is sad indeed when he reads of deeds such as apes might have performed, had they been gifted with a greater degree of mental imitativeness. The parody on Christianity is too close to be pleasant” (1862: 185). The fact that Mormonism appeared to people to be a parody of Christianity or Judaism does not preclude it from being a religion. Nor does it preclude it from being legally recognized in the United States. Likewise, the fact that Pastafarianism appears to be a parody of Christianity does not preclude it from being a religion. Nor should it preclude it from being legally recognized.

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<sup>16</sup>Gerrard’s remark about “supernatural spaghetti” appears to assume that belief in some supernatural entity is required to be a legally recognized religion. Such belief is not required. The courts have extended religious rights to humanist and atheist groups. See *Kaufman v. McCaughtry*, 419 F. 3d 678 (7th Cir. 2005).

The second premise of the argument against Pastafarianism asserts that parodies of established religions are not religions. Although it has been argued that Pastafarianism is not a parody (so that this second premise does not apply to it), some may not accept those arguments. Hence it will be useful to criticize the second premise. The criticism involves the similarity between religions and other cultural artifacts. Religions are much like works of art. But the parodies of works of art are usually also works of art. A parody of a painting is another painting; that of a symphony is another symphony; that of a play is another play; that of a political position is another political position; that of a religion is another religion. Perhaps Mormonism really did originate in a parody of Christianity; if this attack on the second premise is correct, then that fact does not preclude Mormonism from being a real religion. And perhaps Christianity originated in a parody of ancient pagan religions; but on the reasoning given here, that would not prevent Christianity from being a real religion. Likewise, even if it does turn out that Pastafarianism is a parody of established religions (a claim which is here denied), it would still be the case that Pastafarianism is a real religion.

#### 4. Pastafarianism and Religious Dogma

Pastafarians use their parodies of established religions for their own serious religious purposes. Feldman writes that “Pastafarianism is based on a parody with a serious point: It aims to show not only that intelligent design is silly, but that organized religions are silly. That’s a claim about ultimate meaning that could fairly be called theological” (2016). Pastafarianism rejects all dogmatic belief;<sup>17</sup> it thereby rejects all *dogmatic theology*. By rejecting dogmatic theology, it rejects all *revealed theology*. Pastafarians make this rejection explicit by mocking traditional religious revelations. They thereby sincerely declare that those revelations do not point to any ultimate reality.

And the Pastafarian use of parody does make an *explicitly theological* point about ultimate meaning. The use of parody is deliberately intended to make the point that traditional religions are false religions and that traditional deities are false gods. This point is explicitly theological because it asserts that those religions are *idolatrous*. Many writers have used abstract arguments to assert that theistic deities are idols (Feuerbach, 1841; Johnston, 2009; Raymo, 2008). But parody has been used in theological writings *exactly* to make the case that the parodied religions are idolatrous. Elijah used parody to argue that Baal was an idol; St. Augustine used parody to argue that the Greco-Roman gods were idols; Hobbes used it to argue that Catholicism was idolatrous. Pastafarians use parody in exactly the same way to make exactly the same point.

Pastafarian insistence on humor goes beyond the mere assertion that traditional religions are idolatrous. It makes a deeper theological point about the danger of idolatry. The danger is that *our minds naturally tend towards idolatry*; we naturally tend towards belief in bodiless superhuman agency. The naturalness of this belief is well-confirmed by the cognitive science of religion (Atran & Norenzayan, 2004; Barrett, 2000; Bloom, 2007; Boyer, 2008; Johnson, 2016). Traditional Abrahamic theology contains many warnings about the dangers of idolatry. Pastafarians take these warnings seriously: they logically extend them to all traditional religions. Parody is the historically standard way of making the theological point that some class of religions is idolatrous. For the sake of complete consistency Pastafarians apply this warning to their own religion: they make fun of themselves. Self-mockery is the only way to avoid self-deception.

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<sup>17</sup>Pastafarianism rejects dogma. Crucial discussions of this rejection occur on pages 28-29 and 93-100 of *The Gospel*. Dogma is also rejected on 78.

Although Pastafarians reject all revealed theology, they do not reject all theology. Pastafarianism embraces *natural theology*.<sup>18</sup> It also embraces *rational theology*.<sup>19</sup> Natural theology resembles science while rational theology resembles pure mathematics. One of the hallmarks of those theologies is that, like science and mathematics, they will change over time as we gain new evidence and make new arguments. Unfortunately, at any moment in time, any type of human belief tends to harden into dogma. Religion thus tends to become based on faith rather than reason and evidence. To avoid this hardening, science has the scientific method while mathematics has proof. But theology has so far been lacking a method for preventing this hardening. On this point Pastafarians have made an important discovery: the best way to avoid religious dogma is through humor. Any asserted theology must be asserted humorously. Pastafarians mock all revealed theologies; for the sake of consistency, they also mock natural and rational theology. Pastafarians extend their rejection of idolatry to Pastafarianism itself. This self-mockery prevents Pastafarians from taking anything on faith. It forces their minds to remain open in a uniquely honest and sincere relation to ultimate reality.

The methodological insistence on humor shows that the Pastafarians take honesty and truth-telling seriously; they are entirely sincere in their beliefs about ultimate reality. They sincerely believe that ultimate reality is funny. The crucial Pastafarian dogma is that all dogmas are forbidden. But that crucial dogma is paradoxical.<sup>20</sup> As a sincerely asserted paradox, the dogma that there are no dogmas is a serious joke. A long history in Western theology asserts that every effort to understand ultimate reality ends in paradox. This is the history of mysticism. Mysticism asserts that ultimate reality is ineffable; but if it is ineffable, it is impossible to say that it is ineffable (Alston, 1956). The mystical thesis that ultimacy is paradoxical is clearly expressed in the first indicium of religion listed in *Africa v. Pennsylvania*, which states that “a religion addresses fundamental and ultimate questions having to do with deep and imponderable matters” (34). Of course, if those matters are imponderable, then it is impossible to ponder them; but if it is impossible to ponder them, it is likewise impossible to assert that they are imponderable. Hence Judge Gerrard is incorrect when he writes that “it is evident to the Court that FSMism is not a belief system addressing ‘deep and imponderable’ matters” (2016: 9). Pastafarianism belongs to the history of Western mysticism. The mystical paradox provokes laughter. Ultimate reality boiled for your sins. RAmen.

## 5. Pastafarianism and Religious Fictionalism

Pastafarianism incorporates a well-developed philosophical position regarding religious practice. This position is known as *religious fictionalism* (Deng, 2015;

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<sup>18</sup>Pastafarianism embraces natural theology. *The Gospel* states that Pastafarianism is “the only religion based on empirical evidence (xi) and that it is “supported by hard science” (26, see 165). Pastafarians update their theological “beliefs based on new evidence or greater understanding of old evidence” (29, see 96). Likewise “we make a strong argument for our beliefs, with the realization that they could be wrong. . . Our beliefs are based purely on empirical observation” (98). A cosmological argument for the FSM is given on 154-6. An explicit argument is given in 132-3. Most of the discussion in 1-33 advances an implicit design argument for the FSM.

<sup>19</sup>Pastafarianism embraces rational theology (which deduces the FSM using pure logic). Henderson (2006) gives an ontological argument for the FSM in 157-60. He gives mathematical arguments for the FSM in 140-3 and 161-2.

<sup>20</sup>Pastafarians recognize the paradox inherent in the dogmatic rejection of all dogma. See *The Gospel*, xi, 26, 28, 64, 98. See especially 140, where Henderson says the logic of FSM has the “potential to negate even itself – dear God what have I done?”.

Eshleman, 2005, 2016; Wettstein, 1997). On this view, religions are analogous to mathematical systems. The axioms of mathematical systems assert the existence of mathematical things, and they define mathematical operations on those things. For example, the axioms for the natural numbers assert that the existence of 0, 1, 2, 3, and so on. The axioms are *literally stated* as if they were factual truths. But should they be *literally accepted* as factual truths? Do numbers actually exist in objective reality? Or are they just concepts in our heads or symbols we write on paper? These metaphysical questions are studied in philosophy of mathematics. Although they are important, there is no need for mathematicians to wait for the answers. Mathematicians proceed *as if* the numbers objectively exist. They proceed *as if* the axioms are factual truths.

Mathematical fictionalism says that mathematical practice is done *according to mathematical stories*, which are precisely expressed as axiom systems. Although we may have differing positions about the objective existence of the natural numbers, we can all agree that *according to the story of the natural numbers*, there are infinitely many natural numbers, there is no largest prime number, and so on. We can even apply mathematical stories to the real world without worrying about whether or not they are literally true stories. And, when applied to the real world, those stories enable us to do science and to build technologies. Mathematical stories are *extremely useful* and *extremely valuable* stories, whether or not they are literally true or literally false. Fictionalism says that practical utility and practical value do not depend on theoretical truth.

On these points religion resembles mathematics (Wettstein, 1997). To practice our religions, we don't need to wait for confirmation that theological objects (like gods) objectively exist. We can proceed *as if* they do. Atheists and theists can agree that according to the story of Christianity, God exists. And people of all religions can agree that, according to the story of Christianity, Jesus is the messiah. Religious fictionalists say that, in the absence of certain proof, it is a mistake to go any further. Religious stories, like mathematical stories, are extremely useful and extremely valuable. But they are fictions. This does not mean that they are literally false. It means they are *neither* literally true *nor* literally false. They are neither literally true nor literally false because they are *not factual*. As religious fictionalists, Pastafarians are peaceful.<sup>21</sup> Just as there is no point in fighting over the ultimate truth of *Harry Potter* or *The Lord of the Rings*, there is no point in fighting over the ultimate truth of any religion.

Mathematical fictionalism can be practiced sincerely. You can sincerely act as if the axioms of set theory are true; you demonstrate your sincere belief in those actions by proving theorems in set theory. Likewise religious fictionalism can be practiced sincerely. Pastafarians are religious fictionalists. Since Pastafarians do not have certain knowledge about the existence of the FSM, they proceed *as if* He does exist. Beliefs about the FSM are true only *according to the story* of the Church of the FSM. Religious fictionalism entails that all religious activity is *live-action role-playing* (also known as *larping*). All Pastafarian practice is larping. Pastafarians are larping when they dress up as pirates. But Pastafarians regard all religious activity as larping.

Pastafarians argue that other religions are also fictional. For example, beliefs about the Christian God are true only *according to the story* of Christianity. Of course this view will be anathema to Christians, especially to Protestants. But here the Pastafarians make an absolutely serious theological argument: the theologies of these other religions are fictions; but their adherents deny that fact; they are therefore *religiously self-deceived*. For example, since there is no incontrovertible proof that the Bible is inerrant, those who assert that the Bible is inerrant are lying to themselves. Since their religion presupposes self-deception, they are religiously dishonest.<sup>22</sup> By contrast, Pastafarians are religiously required to acknowledge that their religious beliefs are true only according to a story; by

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<sup>21</sup>For the peacefulness of FSM, see *The Gospel*, 27, 28, 65, 94, 166.

<sup>22</sup>This Christian self-deception is discussed in *The Gospel*, 98-100.

bearing this in mind, Pastafarians are religiously honest. This religious honesty is enforced through religious mockery. By making fun of every religion, including itself, Pastafarianism avoids self-deception. This religious honesty, enforced through parody and self-parody, is arguably a form of sincerity deeper than any other.

## 6. Pastafarianism and Religious Existence

The concept of the FSM in Pastafarianism is exactly parallel to the concept of God in a well-established branch of Christian theology. Many Christian theologians, strictly speaking, deny the existence of their God. They declare that God is beyond being; that God is not a being among beings. Paul Tillich, arguably the most important Protestant theologian of the twenty-first century, asserted that God does not exist. Tillich writes that “God does not exist. He is being-itself beyond essence and existence. Therefore, to argue that God exists is to deny him” (Tillich, 1951: 205; 235-7). Tillich writes further that “It is as atheistic to affirm the existence of God as it is to deny it. God is being-itself, not a being” (1951: 237). According to Tillich, the only non-symbolic statement that can be made about God is that “God is being-itself” (1951: 239). All other statements about God are symbolic, meaning that they are not literally true. They are *literally false* or *literally paradoxical* (1951: 239-47).

Pastafarians are entirely free to assert that the claims made by Tillich about the Christian God are in fact *more accurately* made about the FSM. After all, Pastafarians already regard all talk about the FSM as literally false or literally paradoxical. On this very point Pastafarian theology is far more consistent than Christian theology (since Christian theologians disagree with each other about these points). Thus it is entirely appropriate for Pastafarians to say that “[the Flying Spaghetti Monster] does not exist. He is being-itself beyond essence and existence. Therefore, to argue that [the Flying Spaghetti Monster] exists is to deny him.” (paraphrase of Tillich, 1951: 205). Likewise Pastafarians can say that “It is as atheistic to affirm the existence of [the Flying Spaghetti Monster] as it is to deny it. [The Flying Spaghetti Monster] is being-itself, not a being” (paraphrase of Tillich, 1951: 237). All other statements about the FSM are literally false or literally paradoxical. Thus the concrete depiction of the FSM as a mass of noodles, two meatballs, and two eyes is merely figurative.

Pastafarians use humor to reinforce the serious theological assertion that all concrete statements about the FSM are literally false or literally paradoxical. The use of humor is essentially theological. It avoids the *idolatrous reduction* of the FSM to a being among beings, grasped through false literality. On this point, Pastafarianism is *theologically more honest* than a legally recognized religion (Christianity); hence it can claim to be held with greater sincerity, since it does not require self-deception. This reasoning is not merely an apologetic exercise; on the contrary, it is directly asserted by the founder of Pastafarianism. Henderson writes: “Lots of people do view FSM as satire, but I’m not sure how that disqualifies it as a real religion. True Believers make up a small proportion of mainstream religions as well — the difference is that Pastafarians are more honest when they don’t hold a literal view of their religion” (2016b).

## 7. Conclusion

In his ruling against Pastafarianism, Gerrard cited the three indicia of religion in *Africa v. Pennsylvania*. It has been argued above (in Section 2) that Pastafarianism satisfies the third indicium, concerning practice. It has been argued above (in Section 4, but also in Sections 5 and 6) that Pastafarianism satisfies the first indicium, concerning belief about ultimate matters. It remains to address the second indicium, which states that “a religion is comprehensive in nature; it consists of a belief-system as opposed to an

isolated teaching” (*Africa v. Pennsylvania*, 34). Although this second indicium is problematic (many or even most religions do not satisfy it),<sup>23</sup> it should be clear by now that Pastafarianism does satisfy it. But the case made here for the religious authenticity of Pastafarianism goes far beyond the three indicia mentioned in *Africa v. Pennsylvania*. I have shown that Pastafarianism shares many salient features with other religions. These features are not merely superficial; on the contrary, they are theologically deep. Pastafarianism is a real religion. It deserves legal recognition.

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<sup>23</sup>The systematicity of belief is a product of philosophy rather than religion. Here are some religions which are not belief-systems: ancient Egyptian, Greco-Roman, and Norse religions; Native American, Central Asian, and Chinese folk-religions; early Theravadic Buddhism as well as Shinto; animistic and shamanistic religions; New Age religions; neopagan religions like Wicca, Druidism, and Asatru. Systematicity of belief arises late in the Abrahamic religions and late in Hinduism and Buddhism. It may also arise in the Aztec and Yoruba religions. But philosophical religions are unusual.

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