

# Flying Spaghetti Monster is not God, rules mortal judge

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**Kurt Vonnegut and Robert Heinlein cited as prisoner denied access to holy relics**



The Flying Spaghetti Monster



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A United States District Court judge has ruled that Pastafarianism, the cult of the Flying Spaghetti Monster (FSM), is not a religion.

Stephen Cavanaugh, a prisoner in the Nebraska State Penitentiary, brought the case after being denied access to Pastafarian literature and religious items while behind bars. Cavanaugh argued that he is an avid Pastafarian, has the FSM tattoos to prove it, and should therefore be allowed “the ability to order and wear religious clothing and pendants, the right to meet for weekly worship services and classes and the right to receive communion” while on the inside.

Prison officers denied his requests on grounds that Pastafarianism is a parody religion.

Judge John M. Gerrard agreed with the prison officers' argument, noting that Pastafarianism was cooked up as a response to Intelligent Design being taught in the State of Kansas. The decision to teach Intelligent Design was justified as it being one of many widely-held religious beliefs about the origins of the Earth. Activist Bobby Henderson devised Pastafarianism Flying Spaghetti Monster as a riposte, claiming that it, too, was a widely-held belief and that it should also be taught in Kansas' schools.

He devised a mythos for the deity and claimed both a wide following and a long history of secret observance for the FSM cult.

The joke has since taken on a life of its own, with religious works being written to put meat(balls) on the noodles of the religion and scientists claiming that [long strands of gas trailing galaxies](#) may be the “noodly appendage” referred to in canonical works. Pastafarians have occasionally fought for the right to wear a colander on their heads – such strainers are holy to Pastafarians – and won religious freedom cases in [Russia](#) and [Austria](#) allowing them to do in drivers' licence mugshots.

Judge Gerrard was not impressed by those offshore cases, quickly deciding that FSMism is a parody, not an actual religion. Nor was he impressed by Cavanaugh, who had a rather poor grasp on Pastafarianism's key texts, which the judge took the trouble to read.

But Gerrard also wrote “This case is difficult because FSMism, as a parody, is designed to look very much like a religion” and therefore worthy of close consideration of how far religious freedoms extend.

Gerrard's conclusion is that the case “is not a question of theology: it is a matter of basic reading comprehension.”

“The FSM Gospel is plainly a work of satire, meant to entertain while making a pointed political statement. To read it as religious doctrine would be little different from grounding a 'religious exercise' on any other work of fiction. A prisoner could just as easily read the works of Vonnegut or Heinlein and claim it as his holy book, and demand accommodation of Bokomonism or the Church of All Worlds.”

FSM adherents may not like that reasoning. *Reg* readers may not either, but will surely at least acknowledge that a judge familiar with Heinlein and Vonnegut is no bad thing.

That Gerrard's [judgement](#) is entirely serious in its assessment of FSMism, relevant case law and Cavanaugh's case is surely also admirable. Indeed, the judge has clearly done the best any mortal can be expected to do when confronted with a truth as vast as that of the Flying Spaghetti Monster. ®

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