

Flying Spaghetti Monster

Imagine a system that wants us to believe in “truths” that have been declared by a person or group to be true and all else false; to believe in an all-powerful being whom we have never really seen or met; to be told that to believe is better than to know; to let a group of people who do not know us or how we really live, to decide what we should do and not do; to reject evidence-based learning, such as science and common sense; and to accept as true only what is written in a heavily edited ancient book. This is called religion.

One of the most bizarre new religions or rehash of an older religion is called Creationism or “Creation Science.” This is basically an anti-evolutionist belief that life, the earth and the universe were created by a supreme being. Ironically, there are some pious and powerful people who actually demanded that such a flakey ideology be taught as a science in schools alongside modern science.

So bizarre is Creationism that someone simply decided to respond with another bizarre idea. This is the amazing notion of **the Flying Spaghetti Monster (FSM)**, who is the deity of **the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster** or **Pastafarianism** (a portmanteau of pasta and Rastafarian), a movement that promotes a light-hearted view of religion and opposes the teaching of intelligent design and creationism in public schools. Although adherents maintain publicly that Pastafarianism is a genuine religion,¹ it is generally recognized by the media as a parody religion.²

The “Flying Spaghetti Monster” was first described in a 2005 satirical open letter written by Bobby Henderson, allegedly an agnostic Buddhist, then a 24-year-old Oregon State University physics graduate,³ to protest the Kansas State Board of Education decision to permit the teaching of intelligent design as an alternative to evolution in public school science classes.⁴ In that letter, Henderson satirized creationist ideas by professing his belief that whenever a scientist carbon-dates an object, a supernatural creator that closely resembles spaghetti and meatballs is there “changing the results with His Noodly Appendage.”

Henderson argued that his beliefs were just as valid as those of intelligent design, and called for Flying Spaghetti Monsterism to be given equal time in science classrooms alongside intelligent design and evolution.⁵ After Henderson published the letter on his website, the Flying Spaghetti Monster rapidly became an Internet phenomenon and a symbol of opposition to the teaching of intelligent design in public schools.⁶

The central belief is that an invisible and undetectable Flying Spaghetti Monster created the universe. “Pirates” are revered as the original Pastafarians.⁷ Henderson asserts that a decline in the number of Pirates over the years is the cause of global warming (a reminder of the concept that correlation does not imply causation).⁸ The FSM community congregates at

¹ Bobby Henderson, [“About” The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster](#).

² [“The dangers of creationism in education. See para. 52”](#). *Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly*. Dan Vergano, [“Spaghetti Monster’ is noodling around with faith,” USA Today Science & Space article](#), 27 March 2006.

³ Carole M Cusack, *Invented Religions: Imagination, Fiction and Faith*. Ashgate Publishing, 2010:113.

⁴ [“In the beginning there was the Flying Spaghetti Monster”](#). *The Daily Telegraph* (London). 11 Sep 2005.

⁵ Bobby Henderson, [“Open Letter To Kansas School Board,”](#) 2005.

⁶ Sarah Boxer, [“But Is There Intelligent Spaghetti Out There?”](#). *The New York Times* Arts article, 29 Aug 2005.

⁷ [“Austrian Pastafarian dons colander as religious headgear for drivers license,” http://english.alarabiya.net](#), 2011.

⁸ See Bobby Henderson, “Open Letter,” above.

Henderson's website to share ideas about the Flying Spaghetti Monster and crafts representing images of it, as well as to discuss "sightings" of the Flying Spaghetti Monster.

Pastafarian tenets are generally satires of creationism. The Pastafarian scripture, for example, is called the Loose Canon. "RAmen" (with two initial capitals) is the official conclusion to prayers, to certain sections of the Gospel of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, and so on. It is a portmanteau of the Semitic term "Amen" (used in Judaeo-Christianity) and Ramen, Japanese for noodle.

Pastafarian teachings are presented both on Henderson's *Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster* website, where he is described as "prophet," and in *The Gospel of the Flying Spaghetti Monster*, written by Henderson and published by Villiard Press in 2006.

The Flying Spaghetti Monster has received praise from the scientific community and criticism from proponents of intelligent design. Pastafarians have engaged in religious disputes, such as in Polk County, Florida, where they played a role in dissuading the local school-board from adopting new rules on teaching evolution.⁹

Because of its popularity and exposure, the Flying Spaghetti Monster is often used as a contemporary version of "**Russell's teapot**" -- an argument that the philosophic burden of proof lies upon those who make unfalsifiable claims, not on those who reject them.

The British philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872-1970)¹⁰ wrote that if he claims that a teapot orbits the sun somewhere in space between the Earth and Mars, it is nonsensical for him to expect others to believe him on the grounds that they cannot prove him wrong. Russell's teapot is still referred to in discussions concerning the existence of God.

In an article titled "Is There a God?" commissioned, but never published, by *Illustrated* magazine in 1952, Russell wrote:

"Many orthodox people speak as though it were the business of sceptics to disprove received dogmas rather than of dogmatists to prove them. This is, of course, a mistake. If I were to suggest that between the Earth and Mars there is a china teapot revolving about the sun in an elliptical orbit, nobody would be able to disprove my assertion provided I were careful to add that the teapot is too small to be revealed even by our most powerful telescopes.

*But if I were to go on to say that, since my assertion cannot be disproved, it is intolerable presumption on the part of human reason to doubt it, I should rightly be thought to be talking nonsense. If, however, the existence of such a teapot were affirmed in ancient books, taught as the sacred truth every Sunday, and instilled into the minds of children at school, hesitation to believe in its existence would become a mark of eccentricity and entitle the doubter to the attentions of the psychiatrist in an enlightened age or of the Inquisitor in an earlier time."*¹¹

In 1958, Russell elaborated on the analogy as a reason for his own atheism:

"I ought to call myself an agnostic; but, for all practical purposes, I am an atheist. I do not think the existence of the Christian God any more probable than the existence of the Gods of Olympus or Valhalla. To take another illustration: nobody can prove that there is not between the Earth and Mars a china teapot revolving in an elliptical orbit, but nobody thinks

⁹ Billy Townsend, "[Polk Needled, Noodled In Evolution Flap](#)". *The Tampa Tribune*, 22 Dec 2007.

¹⁰ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/russell/>.

¹¹ Bertrand Russell, "[Is There a God? \[1952\]](#)" (PDF). *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, Vol. 11: Last Philosophical Testament, 1943-68*. Routledge. 1952:547 f.

this sufficiently likely to be taken into account in practice. I think the Christian God just as unlikely.”¹²

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¹² Brian Garvey, "[Absence of evidence, evidence of absence, and the atheist’s teapot](#)" (PDF), [Ars Disputandi](#) 10, 2010:9-22.