

Counterreligion? The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster and Shifting  
Discourse on Religion

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Master's thesis

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This study discusses a movement called the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster (CFSM), also known as Pastafarianism. Pastafarianism was born in the United States in 2005. It has since grown to a global phenomenon with numerous communities active both online and offline. While Pastafarianism is generally considered a parody religion or an Atheist satire criticising privileges awarded to religion in society, its open-endedness and subtle balance between different discourses on religion (and non-religion) make it open for many kinds of interpretations and uses. In this study, I examine the way Pastafarians construct their movement discursively, how they negotiate the categories of 'religion' and 'atheism', and how they locate Pastafarianism in relation to these two categories. I examine the way this movement is taking part in discourses that question the widely accepted categorisations and boundaries of 'religion'. As research material I examine the writings of Bobby Henderson on his Pastafarianism-dedicated website The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster and written interview responses I have received from numerous Pastafarians in different European countries. My study sheds light on the way Pastafarians creatively mix and use different discursive strands on religion and produce an elusive, potent tool for both questioning and maintaining certain cultural category boundaries concerning religion and non-religion. I also examine whether the concept of counterreligion would be useful analytical tool in describing this process.

**Keywords:** Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, invented religions, parody religions, atheism, counterreligion, religion and secular, public-private distinction, discursive study of religion

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Research theme

### *1.1.1 Background*

This study examines a movement called Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, also known as Pastafarianism. Since its inception in 2005, the Church of FSM has stirred plenty of confusion, controversy, and hilarity. It has also rapidly grown in popularity, and today Pastafarian communities can be found all around the globe, mostly online but also offline. Pictures of people wearing pasta strainers on their heads in driving license photos or wearing showy pirate costumes regularly pop up in the media, accompanied by news stories of devotees proclaiming their sincere belief in a supreme being called Flying Spaghetti Monster – a benevolent, if a little wayward creator god that consists of spaghetti, meatballs, and what appear to be two breadsticks. People calling themselves Pastafarians are often adamant in their claim that Pastafarianism is a real religion and is therefore to be accorded every courtesy, just like any other religion. In addition, they seem to find it important that all religions are given equal status, rights, and privileges. They also point out that in most societies one or a few religions are granted a special privileged status while other religions, like Pastafarianism, are being rejected and even ridiculed. And interviews given to the media are not where it ends – many Pastafarians actively take their grievances to courts of law and pursue the legal route to gain official recognition from the state and public authorities.

Granted, the efforts of Pastafarians wearing their pasta strainers, ending their prayers and blessings by uttering the name of a Japanese noodle brand (Ramen), or testifying on how they've been “touched by a noodly appendage” can seem mighty ridiculous. At the same time, their activities, campaigns, and the language they use is often very dedicated, concerted, and logical. Their arguments and their activities ring some bells, too. A spectator gets the sense that someone else did this before – only perhaps they weren't wearing a full pirate regalia while doing it. Indeed, disputes about the legitimacy and status of various religious, ethnic, or other group identities have become

more prevalent during the recent years, and Pastafarian adherents seem to be invoking similarly shaped arguments.<sup>1</sup>

All this begs the question, what is going on? Are these people serious? And, if so, what exactly are they serious about? Is this a joke, political satire aiming to prove a point, or perhaps an attempt to mock religion and the religious? Pastafarianism would not be the first to do any of these things. Sure enough, religious beliefs sounding ridiculous to outsiders have sprung up from time to time. Similarly, humour and parody have often been used to mock religious traditions, be it for a simple laugh or to further an agenda of some variety. And parody versions of religious institutions in some ways reminiscent of Pastafarianism have popped up throughout the history.<sup>2</sup>

Although neither the first nor the only one around, there still seems to be something about Pastafarianism that sets it apart. For one thing, the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster clearly has outlasted the usually short life-span of an amusing internet meme. Pastafarian communities have become more organised and their adherents more numerous than a simple having a laugh would suggest – although certainly many people do have a laugh with it. However, the amount of concerted action and effort put into the movement by some of its proponents does suggest that something bigger is going on as well.

It does seem reasonably clear, although difficult to prove formally, that Pastafarianism includes at least “an element of satire”, as the founder of the movement Bobby Henderson has put it.<sup>3</sup> Beyond simply insisting that Pastafarianism is a valid religion, Henderson and many Pastafarians argue that despite the funny or satirical parts of their scripture, there is also some kind of serious underlying content. This is not entirely unheard of. There are movements commonly described as religious that include humorous elements in their tradition. Some more time-honored examples could include

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Identity politics’ is a term often referred to when referring to the act of claiming e.g. rights and recognition based on some group identity. Sociologist Manuel Castells has written on the meaning of identity in the information age, see Castells 2010. In the field of religious studies, one example of studies into identity politics, see Miller (ed.) 2015. Teemu Taira has also examined New Atheism as a form of identity politics, see Taira 2012.

<sup>2</sup> See Quillen 2017; Laycock 2013; Chidester 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Henderson: About.



various Native American traditions and mythologies with their central yet humorous trickster character, or certain features of Zen Buddhism of Rinzai School.

Pastafarianism is often associated with atheism, and Pastafarian communities and different Atheist, freethinker, or secularist organisations seem to have plenty of overlap online. Many Atheist websites report on Pastafarian activities and campaigns, clearly viewing Pastafarians as their own or at least being on the same side.<sup>4</sup> (For instance, when searching for material on the Flying Spaghetti Monster, Google Ads offered me Richard Dawkins Foundation website first thing.) Simply equating the two, though, would be a stretch. Both from previous research and from the responses I have received, it would seem clear that many Pastafarians also identify as Atheists. However, many of them still make a clear distinction between atheism and Pastafarianism. Henderson also strictly refutes Pastafarianism being “an Atheist club”<sup>5</sup>. In addition, there are Pastafarians who do not identify as Atheists, or identify as both Atheists and Pastafarians, and see no contradiction there.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, assigning Pastafarianism into any single category turns out to be a difficult task. As the movement is based on Bobby Henderson’s views, his ideas are likely to carry some weight, but even his take on the matter is slightly ambiguous. Besides, we are dealing with a radically open movement that has no formal overseeing structure to decide what the correct interpretation is. Henderson has explicitly described Pastafarianism as being against dogma and all members have a say in how the movement develops.<sup>7</sup> Pastafarianism could well be described as cultural open source.<sup>8</sup> Different groups of Pastafarians as well as individual practitioners seem to have varying

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<sup>4</sup> Laycock 2010, 25.

<sup>5</sup> Henderson, About.

<sup>6</sup> Pastafarians are not the only ones creating discourse that crosses or problematises the category boundary between religious and non-religious. In fact, some of the “spiritual but not religious” discourse does precisely the same thing. See for example Huss, Boasz 2014. Spirituality: The Emergence of a New Cultural Category and its Challenge to the Religious and the Secular. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29:1, 47-60.

<sup>7</sup> Henderson 2008a, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Open source is a term derived from computer software development circles, where it refers to source code being freely available to users. Dictionary.com, for instance, describes open source as “software whose source code is available free of charge to the public to use, copy, modify, sublicense, or distribute” or in a broader sense of the term “denoting a product or system whose origins, formula, design, etc., are freely accessible to the public”.

<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/open--source> [Accessed on February 20th, 2018.] Note that I am not referring to open-source religion, which is a distinct phenomenon. For an overview, see Wikipedia: Open-source religion. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open-source\\_religion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open-source_religion) [Accessed on March 6th, 2018.]

interpretations of the movement, and it is impossible to say which one should be considered the most legitimate.

### *1.1.2 Parody religion*

In the parlance of certain internet communities as well as in academic circles Pastafarianism has occasionally been labelled a parody religion, satire religion, or similar.<sup>9</sup> The exact meaning of this category is often ambiguous and there seems to be fluctuation in what word in the pair is emphasised. In some cases, it seems to be the first word, implying that these movements are (non-religious) parodies of religion. Other times, it is used as a description for movements that could at least in some way be considered ‘really religious’. Often the exact interpretation is not clear. At times it seems that both positions are held simultaneously. This variability is not limited to academic circles. In Wikipedia classifications, for instance, parody religion finds its place in a rather elaborate classificatory framework under the broader title of ‘irreligion’.<sup>10</sup>

Pastafarianism has been grouped together with movements such as Discordianism, Church of the SubGenius, Church of the Invisible Pink Unicorn, and Church of Bacon among others. These groupings vary depending on the common denominator chosen.<sup>11</sup> They also vary depending on the time any research is conducted or classification is made, because movements like this are often either short-lived or at least ever-changeable.

One illuminating example of the ambiguity of the category of parody religion in a non-academic context can be found on RationalWiki, a Wiki-format online encyclopaedia community project which states its aims as including “[a]nalyzing and refuting

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<sup>9</sup> Essi Mäkelä has examined the concept of parody religion in her Master’s thesis titled *Parodian ja usknon risteyksessä*. Her study focuses on Discordians, but she does briefly consider Pastafarianism as well, suggesting, for instance, that Pastafarianism might over time become something “more than a parody”. In general, she notes that the concept should be elaborated on further. Mäkelä 2012, 3–7. On satire religion, see Narizny 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Atheism. Wikipedia.

<sup>11</sup> Pastafarianism grouped together with Discordianism and Church of the SubGenius as an invented religion, see Cusack 2010; Pastafarianism grouped together with Church of Bacon and Church of the Invisible Pink Unicorn, see Quillen 2017.

pseudoscience and the anti-science movement; [d]ocumenting the full range of crank ideas; and criticism of how these subjects are handled in the media.”<sup>12</sup> RationalWiki entry summarises parody religion as follows:

A parody religion is a modern religion thought up to mock or ape the principles, beliefs, and self-righteousness of "real" religions; those in which people seriously believe.<sup>13</sup>

This short passage conveys that, first, parody religion is “thought up”, i.e. purposefully created to mock religion or some facets of it. However, parody religion is a modern *religion*, whereas the reality of real religions is put in quotation marks. Further, serious belief is mentioned as a defining feature of these “real” religions. After this definition, a list of parody religions follows with 25 items on it, interestingly including Jedi religion and Scientology – the latter with the specification “uniquely on this list, its adherents don’t know it”. After these 25 items, sub-headings “Parody religions that can be taken seriously” and “Parody religions that are probably bad for your health” follow. Scientology appears again on both lists, and it is clear that Scientology is used as a running gag in the article. Discordianism and Church of the SubGenius are both listed as parody religions that can be taken seriously.<sup>14</sup> This is interesting, as it widens the idea of parody religion: “taking seriously” here seems to refer to taking something seriously as a religion. Discordianism and Church of the SubGenius both have a relatively long history and they are often considered to occupy a status somewhere between the categories of parody and real.

RationalWiki is hardly a neutral platform; the community openly sports a particular, secularist view on religion. The entry on parody religions is as much polemic as it is an attempt to spread information. I do not introduce this take on parody religion as a definition I would subscribe to or use in my study. Rather, I wish to show one of the ways the term is used in certain internet communities and demonstrate the complexity of this category, not just in academic research, but also out there on the vast plains of Internet.

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<sup>12</sup> About. RationalWiki.

<sup>13</sup> Parody religion. RationalWiki.

<sup>14</sup> Parody religion. RationalWiki.

The category of parody religions, into which Pastafarianism is often placed, does not seem to help much in dealing with the ambiguity of the movement. It could well be that categorisation is not the best way to analyse a movement of this sort in general. In this study, I will move some steps away from categorising and instead examine the language use of Pastafarians themselves to see what kind of constructions of religion, non-religion, and Pastafarianism can be traced in their writings.

## 1.2 The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster

### *1.2.1 Brief history*

The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster first came into being in 2005. In August 2005, Kansas State Board of Education decided to allow the teaching of alternative theories to evolution in the science classes of the state's public schools.<sup>15</sup> In practice, these alternative theories primarily meant teaching Intelligent Design. ID is generally regarded as pseudo-scientific. Carole Cusack succinctly refers to it as the “latest re-packaging of Creationism”.<sup>16</sup> However, the proponents of ID do not explicitly refer to any specific god as the intelligent designer. As soon became evident, this leaves room for some manoeuvring.<sup>17</sup>

Shortly after the decision was made, certain Bobby Henderson, then an unemployed Physics graduate, wrote a letter to the Board to express his concern. He stated that while it is indeed important to teach alternative views to evolution, it is also important to see to it that children are not only taught one version of ID, that is, the Christian version. Henderson explained that he and “many others around the world” believe that the world is created by a supreme intelligent being called the Flying Spaghetti Monster. Henderson demanded that in the name of equality this theory, backed with scientific evidence, should also be taught in the public schools. Study time should be equally divided, “[o]ne third time for Intelligent Design, one third time for Flying Spaghetti Monsterism (Pastafarianism), and one third time for logical conjecture based on

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<sup>15</sup> Kansas evolution hearings. Talkorigins.com.

<sup>16</sup> Cusack 2010, 133.

<sup>17</sup> Narizny 2009, 42–43.

overwhelming observable evidence.” He also expressed his wish that “no legal action need to be taken”, thereby insinuating that he was prepared to take the issue further.<sup>18</sup>

Having received no reply, Henderson finally posted the letter online, and it soon spread over the internet.<sup>19</sup> Big news websites such as BoingBoing.com and Fark.com picked it up and helped to spread the story. The letter was also noticed by the press media, and it was published in several newspapers, such as the Washington Post and the New York Times. According to his own words, Henderson was overwhelmed by the popularity of the letter. He has stated that within one year after publishing the email he had received more than 15,000 emails.<sup>20</sup> Gradually, the Flying Spaghetti Monster started gaining followers and a movement started taking shape. Henderson went on to write *The Gospel of the Flying Spaghetti Monster* and it was published by Villard Books in 2006.<sup>21</sup>

Such, in brief, is the beginning of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster (CFSM), and the story only starts here. Since first becoming an internet sensation, the movement has rapidly grown in fame and popularity. Pastafarian communities have been founded around the globe, and especially many online communities, such as Facebook groups and pages, have thousands of members and likers.<sup>22</sup> The activity of the groups is often based on the internet, even though across the world there are also local communities, and regional and even national gatherings are organised in many countries.<sup>23</sup> In Europe, the “European Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster” has been founded as a tool for furthering cooperation between different groups.<sup>24</sup>

What started as Henderson’s humorous protest blurring the boundaries between science and religious principles has since grown, evolved, and taken up new issues. As more

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<sup>18</sup> Henderson 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Cusack 2010, 133.

<sup>20</sup> Narizny 2009, 44–45.

<sup>21</sup> Henderson 2006.

<sup>22</sup> For example, the European Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster page on Facebook has 4,013 followers, a group named Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster has 61,194 members. Facebook: The European Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster; Facebook: The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster.

<sup>23</sup> My respondents from e.g. Italy, Spain, Turkey, and Germany report on gatherings on regional, national, and even international level. TKU/O/18/18; TKU/O/18/14; TKU/O/18/4.

<sup>24</sup> About us. European Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster.

people have been “touched by His noodly appendage”, new ideas, imagery, and creative ways of taking the message further have surfaced. There is no formal institution to oversee the usage of Pastafarian imagery, which means that many different interpretations may well live side by side.

Many Pastafarian individuals and groups around the world have run campaigns that highlight the interface between religious communities and state regulation. In many countries, Pastafarians have started legal processes aimed at being formally recognised as religious communities by the state, and consequently be awarded all the rights that come with such a position. Depending on the country, this could mean the right to receive public funding, right to do certain charitable work, wed couples, provide faith-based religious education in public schools, to name a few examples. Pastafarians are quick to point out that their religion is, “by any rational metric”<sup>25</sup>, compatible with the criteria for a religious community, and that measuring something like ‘real faith’ is problematic to say the least. They have also won court cases and rights to express their faith in multiple ways. One widely reported case was that of the Austrian Atheist Niko Alm, who was after a long debate granted the right to wear a pasta strainer on his head in a driving license photo. Alm claimed that the strainer fell under the category of religious headgear, which is exempt from the general prohibition of wearing anything on one’s head in a driving license photo.<sup>26</sup> The Austrian authorities in question claimed, however, that the strainer was not in any way covering facial features, and this was the reason it was allowed – not its alleged religious status.<sup>27</sup> Be that as it may, Alm won plenty of visibility to the Flying Spaghetti Monster.

### 1.2.2 *Pastafarian teachings*

The core teachings of Pastafarianism can be found in *The Gospel of the Flying Spaghetti Monster*, or in brief on Henderson’s website [venganza.org](http://venganza.org). The Flying Spaghetti Monster is the creator god of Pastafarianism. According to the gospel it is he who has created the universe, allegedly starting from the creation of a midgit [sic], a

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<sup>25</sup> “By any rational metric, Pastafarians are as legitimate a religious group as any.” Henderson, About.

<sup>26</sup> “Austrian driver allowed 'pastafarian' headgear photo”. BBC News 2011.

<sup>27</sup> Taira 2016a, 140.

tree and a mountain.<sup>28</sup> After this, he has for reasons unknown put much effort in making the world appear much older than it is.<sup>29</sup> The gospel can also account for the problem of theodicy: The Flying Spaghetti Monster was drunk while creating the universe. This is why there are so many flaws and poorly thought-out aspects in our existence. Pastafarians refer to this idea as ‘unintelligent design’<sup>30</sup>.

Pirates are the chosen people of the FSM, which is why pirate regalia is considered the religious outfit of a Pastafarian. This is partially due to the belief (backed by scientific evidence, according to the proponents) that there is a causal link between the diminishing number of pirates and the increasing temperatures of the Earth. Dressing up as a pirate can thus help fight the climate change.<sup>31</sup> Another typical outward sign of faith is the religious headgear, namely the pasta strainer. Flying Spaghetti Monster is also described as a benevolent god, since he offers his followers a heaven in which one can find a beer volcano and a stripper factory. FSM has also given his followers certain moral guidelines, presented in the codified form of “Eight I’d Really Rather You Didn’t’s”.<sup>32</sup>

The most striking feature of the Church of the FSM is its rather pompous religious language and associated imagery, which many find humorous and satirical of (mostly Christian) religious teachings and practices, and of Intelligent Design. However, many Pastafarians point out that adherents to other religions hold beliefs that seem equally absurd to them and sometimes claim that there is no satire or humour involved in their teachings, even though their scripture might seem outlandish to outside observers.<sup>33</sup>

### *1.2.3 Pastafarianism today*

As many previous researchers have already noted, Pastafarianism has clearly struck a chord, and unlike many other similar movements it has proven very resilient in its

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<sup>28</sup> Cusack 2010, 133.

<sup>29</sup> Henderson 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Henderson 2006, 38–40; Dammes 2009, 27.

<sup>31</sup> Henderson 2005.

<sup>32</sup> Henderson 2006, 99–101.

<sup>33</sup> Henderson, About.

popularity. As mentioned earlier, any definite numbers are difficult to provide, given that only in very few countries Pastafarian communities have a registered membership – and besides, even there probably many people who in some shape or form support the movement or identify with it without being an official member. Numbers in general are not necessarily the best approach to explaining Pastafarianism, but I provide some here regardless.

One way of examining the spread of Pastafarianism, at least the name of it, is to examine social media platforms and other popular online communities. On Wikipedia, there is an entry under the term “Flying Spaghetti Monster” in 51 different languages. “Pastafarianism” yields entries in 21 different languages. There is some overlap, as a couple of the articles, the English one for instance, has been linked to both terms. Still, the fact that at least some information about The Church of the FSM has been written by Wikipedia users in so many national and regional languages suggests something about the interest it has evoked. I have not examined the contents of these websites, as that would be a task too wide in scope for this research, but this would definitely be an interesting study to conduct in the future. On Facebook, numerous groups have been founded around Pastafarianism and some of them have a wide base of followers. With a quick search, the search term “pastafari” reached more than a hundred groups, although most of them consist of only a couple of members. The search term “flying spaghetti monster” yields more than 200 hits in pages alone. The number of people following these pages varies from a couple of people to tens of thousands. The two biggest pages I was able to reach with Facebook’s own search boast a following of 61,401 users and 68,168 users respectively.<sup>34</sup> On Russian social media website Vkontakte, 223,731 users mention Pastafarianism in their profile.<sup>35</sup>

What do these numbers tell exactly? Beyond the fact that on some level at least Pastafarianism has stuck with many people, not very much. The fact that people join groups, like and follow pages, or fill in Pastafarianism as their religious affiliation, does not tell much about, say, what this means to these people, on what level they are actually active in Pastafarian communities, or how they understand the movement. This

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<sup>34</sup> Facebook: The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster; Facebook: Flying Spaghetti Monster.

<sup>35</sup> Vkontakte people search, “Пастафарианство”.



reflects the disorganised nature of Pastafarianism itself, but also developments in the structure of our contemporary social environments more generally.<sup>36</sup>

Obviously, a relatively superficial screening of Google, Wikipedia, Facebook and the like alone does not say much about the popularity or the activity of a movement in any given region. One person or a couple of people can easily write a well-sourced Wikipedia article or start a very impressive-looking website, and people following a group or page on Facebook are not necessarily involved in the community. In addition, some communities are short-lived, and some websites I came across have not been updated for some time. Still, bearing all these limitations in mind, exploring the Internet does offer some background information on Pastafarian communities.

It would be very interesting to study all the related terms and categories linked with the Wikipedia articles and Facebook pages and groups. For example, on Wikipedia, examining the terms linked to articles written on Pastafarianism could reveal something about the connections Wikipedia users editing the articles perceive between Pastafarianism and other topics. On the Russian Wikipedia, the entry on Pastafarianism is linked to topics such as “Invisible pink unicorn”, “Russel’s teapot”, “Missionary Church of Copyism”, and “The Church of the Incomplete”.<sup>37</sup> Wikipedia can be considered sort of a ‘dispositive’<sup>38</sup>, a virtual space where many people turn when they are looking for quick basic information on a lot of topics. As a collaborative enterprise where in principle anyone is welcome to make their own additions, Wikipedia can be seen as a space where acceptable knowledge on a given topic is negotiated.

Pastafarian communities started to emerge in Europe soon after Henderson’s letter was published and the movement started taking shape in the US. For instance, according to a German respondent, an unofficial group was started in Germany already in 2005.<sup>39</sup> Many respondents could not pinpoint when the very first, unofficial communities have been started, and in some cases there have been more than one unrelated Facebook

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<sup>36</sup> See e.g. Taira 2006; Cusack 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Пастафаріанство, Wikipedia.

<sup>38</sup> Von Stuckrad 2014, 11; 2016, 216.

<sup>39</sup> TKU/O/18/4, 0.

groups or other online communities, and at times activity has earlier communities has faded and moved to other ones.<sup>40</sup> A Facebook group or another similar social media platform seems to have been a typical starting point, and plenty of the community activities still seem to take place online, although offline gatherings are also organised.

In many countries Pastafarian activists have started campaigns to have their religion officially recognised by public authorities. In many cases, their claims have been rejected. In Finland, for instance, *Suomen Pastafarinen Kirkko* was refused the status of an officially registered religious community. The community took the case to Supreme Administrative Court, but they were turned down.<sup>41</sup> However, there have been successes as well. The Dutch Pastafarian church *Kerk van het Vliegend Spaghettimonster* was registered as an official religious organisation in 2016.<sup>42</sup> In New Zealand, Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster has been registered as an organisation that can officiate weddings.<sup>43</sup> To my knowledge, physical churches or places of worship have been established in Templin, Germany<sup>44</sup>, Nijmegen in the Netherlands<sup>45</sup>, and Nizhny Novgorod in Russia<sup>46</sup>.

Apart from attempts to have their community registered as a real religion, Pastafarians have launched various other campaigns and engaged in debates with public authorities. Following the example of Niko Alm, many Pastafarians have had their driving license photos taken wearing a pasta strainer. Russian Pastafarian Andrei Filin, for instance, was granted the right to wear a knitted pasta strainer on his head in his driving license photo in 2016.<sup>47</sup> News and pictures about the photos have typically been circulated in the media. In Templin, Germany, the Pastafarian community was granted the right to put up street signs advertising their weekly gatherings, similar to those by Christian congregations in the town.<sup>48</sup> Apparently, the officials did not have a problem with allowing this. However, the decision to allow these signs did provoke some anger

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<sup>40</sup> TKU/O/18/3.

<sup>41</sup> “Lyhyt selostus rekisteröinnin etenemisestä”, Suomen Pastafarinen Kirkko.

<sup>42</sup> “We zijn officieel ingeschreven bij de KVK!” Kerk van het Vliegend Spaghettimonster; “Vanaf nu telt het Vliegend Spaghettimonster-geloof écht mee”. Kerk van het Vliegend Spaghettimonster.

<sup>43</sup> “Marriage”. Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, New Zealand Reformed.

<sup>44</sup> TKU/O/18/4.

<sup>45</sup> Plaum 2015.

<sup>46</sup> “First ever church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster opens in Russia”. Russia Beyond the Headlines.

<sup>47</sup> Sims 2016.

<sup>48</sup> TKU/O/18/4, 2:1.

among the other local faith communities.<sup>49</sup> In Spain, Pastafarians have been able to produce stamps with their own illustrations.<sup>50</sup> In Italy, Pastafarian flashmobs or other public performances have countered demonstrations of groups against gay rights.<sup>51</sup> These are but a few examples of the forms that Pastafarianism has taken in different countries in recent years.

### 1.3 Previous research

So far, the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster has attracted only modest interest from scholars of religion. Still, in recent years several scholars of religion have started to pay more attention to the phenomenon of parody religion, and I have been able to find some studies addressing Pastafarianism directly. Four of the studies I have discovered are unpublished BA or MA theses, and only two have Pastafarianism as their sole object of study. In this section, I will offer a short overview of the research I have found on Pastafarianism and briefly map the perspectives they have chosen.

The first scholarly mentions of Pastafarianism I have found date back to years 2006 and 2007. Douglas E. Cowan has briefly discussed Pastafarianism in his chapter “Religion on the Internet” in the *SAGE Handbook of Sociology of Religion*.<sup>52</sup> In this chapter, Cowan discusses online religions in general, but notes interestingly that what would most likely have remained a small enough phenomenon before the possibilities offered by the World Wide Web has “blossomed into a movement that, though not yet a religious movement *per se*<sup>53</sup>, has religious discourse at its heart, finds its chief mode of communication on the Internet”.<sup>54</sup> In the AAR 2007 annual conference in San Diego, in a group dedicated to Religion and Popular Culture, Lucas Johnston, Gavin van Horn, Alyssa Beall, and Samuel Snyder each presented a paper on Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster.<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, I have not been able to find the actual papers, only

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<sup>49</sup> Information on the debate over the roadside signs, see for instance: “Brandenburg faces wrath of Flying Spaghetti Monster”. The Local.de.

<sup>50</sup> TKU/O/18/18, 1:1.

<sup>51</sup> TKU/O/18/6, 0.

<sup>52</sup> Cowan 2007, 357–376.

<sup>53</sup> Emphasis original.

<sup>54</sup> Cowan 2007, 61.

<sup>55</sup> AAR Online Program Book.

their abstracts. However, the abstracts already show what kind of issues these researchers have focused their attention on.

Johnston's paper *Pirates Can Predict the Weather: The Flying Spaghetti Monster and the Nature of Truthiness* focused on the disputes over religion and education, and the various contentious points in the American culture (e.g. the separation of church and state) the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster pointed out. In his abstract, Johnston states that he examines "the role of science as a source of authority in public policy discourse, as well as the role of religious myth in public education venues, and asks some questions about the boundaries of religious freedom in a democratic society". According to the abstract, Johnson's work focuses on the debate on 'alternative theories' and the American context, where the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster originated.<sup>56</sup>

Van Horn's paper titled *Noodling around with Religion: Carnival Play, Monstrous Humor, and the Noodly Master* discusses the subversive humour in Church of the FSM, basing his analysis on the work of e.g. Mikhail Bakhtin, more specifically his views on subversive humour and the functions of carnival traditions. Van Horn sees similarity in Church of the FSM and other popular, carnival traditions that can question authority by making it seem absurd.<sup>57</sup> Alyssa Beall focuses on the virtual context of the Church of the FSM. In her paper titled *A Pirate's Life for Me: Hacking Traditional Religion* she focuses on the way the medium – the internet – has both aided the spread of CFMSM and simultaneously shaped its message. Samuel Snyder's paper, titled *Holy Pasta and Authentic Sauce: The Flying Spaghetti Monster's Messy Implications for Theorizing Religion*, explores the possible effects of taking 'fake' or 'parody religions' such as the CFMSM seriously in scholarly theorising on religion.<sup>58</sup>

Together these papers offer a good spread of different viewpoints that are important to consider when trying to sort out what the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster is about; the societal practices it interacts with, the character and function of its humorous

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<sup>56</sup> Johnston 2007.

<sup>57</sup> Van Horn 2007.

<sup>58</sup> Beall 2007.

imagery, the fact that it is very much a product of Internet age and popular among those who spend time in online communities, and finally the “messy theoretical implications” for scholars of religion, as Snyder succinctly put it.<sup>59</sup>

Johnston and Van Horn have also written an article to *Golem* titled “Evolutionary Controversy and a Side of Pasta: The Flying Spaghetti Monster and the Subversive Function of Religious Parody”<sup>60</sup>, title being the same as the theme of the conference group. The paper deals with the same themes as the two researchers’ conference papers, especially the subversive humour employed by the Church of the FSM to make its point:

Like carnival celebrations of the Middle Ages, which often took place in tandem with revered Catholic holy days, the Flying Spaghetti Monster tinkers with religious mythology and language, appropriating symbols, digesting them, and spitting them back out as a challenge to literalistic dogma.<sup>61</sup>

The focus of the article is on the Flying Spaghetti Monster figure, a grotesque monster that is used to instil, not terror, but subversive laughter.<sup>62</sup> The authors point out that the Flying Spaghetti Monster falls in line with several of the functions of subversive humour Bakhtin has outlined.<sup>63</sup> The paper is an in-depth analysis of the sort of humour Church of the FSM employs, and what kind of effects it may have.

Another angle from which Church of the FSM has been approached is the question whether it, together with other movements classified as parody or satire religion, could be seen as a real religion. Similar explorations have been conducted on parody religions before Pastafarianism arrived at the scene, but Laurel Narizny’s BA thesis *Ha Ha Only Serious. A Preliminary Study on Joke Religions* (2009) is the first to include Pastafarianism in its selection of what the author names ‘joke religions’. Examining three examples of joke religions, Narizny draws a distinction between those joke religions that are ultimately real religions, and the ones that are purely jokes that have no religious content. The movements in the former category she names ‘satirical

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<sup>59</sup> Snyder 2007.

<sup>60</sup> Johnston & Van Horn 2006.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 12.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 2–3.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 12–14.

religions'.<sup>64</sup> These, according to Narizny, employ 'deep play' (a term she borrows from Johan Huizinga<sup>65</sup>) and sacred laughter as a genuine way to deeper enlightenment.<sup>66</sup> The latter group Narizny defines as parody religions. These are purely jokes that do not have a real religious dimension to them, but focus on pointing out "the flaws in the religions they are mocking".<sup>67</sup> Pastafarians are, in Narizny's view, playful Atheists, whereas adherents to, say, Discordianism, are "overwhelmingly likely to be playful believers".<sup>68</sup> Still, Narizny does leave slightly open the possibility that even parody religions, which she considers to be insincere, can in some cases "provide for the inherent human need for spirituality"<sup>69</sup>.

While Narizny's work is in many ways interesting, an important problem remains unsolved. As Carole Cusack has pointed out, Narizny's way of analysing these movements still relies on an underlying assumption of what religion really is.<sup>70</sup> While carefully pointing out that parody and absurdity may have multiple uses and dimensions to them and that the movements she examines are not necessarily all the same, Narizny's work does not really take us further from the idea that religion ultimately deals with something like serious faith. It is possible to operate with such definitions, but from the perspective of this study, this assumption is exactly the kind of thing that should be studied rather than used as a starting point for analysis.

Maria Riihimäki's BA thesis, written in 2016, approaches Pastafarianism from a relatively similar viewpoint. In her work titled *Pyhä Pasta! Pyhän ja Pastafarismin kohtaamisia* Riihimäki examines Pastafarianism through the concept of sacred developed in the works of Mircea Eliade, Èmile Durkheim, and Veikko Anttonen.<sup>71</sup> She also examines her respondent's views comparing them with Zen Buddhist tradition as

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<sup>64</sup> Narizny 2009, 16, 22.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 14. It appears that Narizny is in fact referring to Johan Huizinga, Dutch historian who worked on the concept of deep play. See Huizinga, Johan (1938) 1940. *Homo Ludens*. Amsterdam.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. Unfortunately, Narizny does not mention the exact original source.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 22.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 3. Narizny's work also illuminates the various problems in defining whether something is a parody religion or satirical religion, as she notes when examining her third example, the Centre for Duck Studies. Narizny seems to conclude that this movement could be interpreted as either, depending on the interpretation of the reader. Narizny 2009, 52.

<sup>69</sup> Narizny 2009, 22.

<sup>70</sup> Cusack 2010, 48–49, 136–137.

<sup>71</sup> Riihimäki 2016, 2, 11–14.

well as a charismatic movement called the Toronto Blessing.<sup>72</sup> Much in line with Narizny's work and her usage of 'deep play', Riihimäki sees sacred laughter as something potentially present in Pastafarianism – to borrow Narizny's categorisation, Riihimäki's interpretation of Pastafarianism seems closer to the 'satirical religions'. She analyses the writings of a Finnish Pastafarian whose interpretation of Pastafarianism emphasises the enlightening and perspective-changing effects of humour and laughter present in Pastafarianism.<sup>73</sup> Riihimäki notes that, at least in the way her informant has interpreted Pastafarianism, it certainly includes elements of sacred, especially sacred laughter. She notes, for instance, that her informant has found in Pastafarianism "a way to live in a chaotic world"<sup>74</sup>. This is an interesting potential interpretation of Pastafarianism that I did not come across as clearly in my own research, even though some of my respondents made passing references to chaos and the way Pastafarianism makes you question things and not take yourself too seriously.<sup>75</sup>

Another study exploring the CFSM is a BA thesis written by Jessie Dammes, also in 2009. Dammes' work, *Anthropology of the Flying Spaghetti Monster*, focuses solely on the CFSM, of which she is an inactive member. The overarching research question Dammes sets out to examine is relatively broad: "What is the social significance of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster in relation to religion and science?"<sup>76</sup> It seems that Dammes has encountered problems like those I have come across while studying Pastafarianism. It is a very complex, multifaceted phenomenon, and there is little previous research to support the work. Dammes does a good job describing Pastafarianism and examining the movement from three different angles. She examines the satirical element in Pastafarianism and, mainly focusing on the US and the debate surrounding evolution and ID in public education, the way Pastafarianism is used in the "clash between science and religion".<sup>77</sup> She also examines whether, and on what conditions, Pastafarianism could be considered a satirical parody or a genuine religion. She concludes that Pastafarianism seems to be located somewhere between the categories of religion and irreligion. While it could well be placed in several different scholarly definitions of religion, it also exhibits clear traces of irreligiosity. These do not

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 17–20.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 16–21.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 22. Translated from Finnish by author.

<sup>75</sup> TKU/O/18/3; TKU/O/18/16, 1:8; TKU/O/18/13, 2:3.

<sup>76</sup> Dammes 2009, 5.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 25.

need to be mutually exclusive.<sup>78</sup> As a BA thesis, Dammes's work is in many ways preliminary, but it raises very interesting ideas and questions to be pursued further.

To my knowledge the first published volume to consider the CFSM is Carole Cusack's monograph *Invented Religions. Imagination, Fiction and Faith* (2010). Cusack examines several new religious movements under the category of invented religions. Other examples include Discordianism, Church of All Worlds, Matrixism, CFSM, and Jedi religion. What all of these movements have in common is that they openly declare their 'invented' status. Cusack examines the underlying logic of these movements and argues that invented religions reflect the new cultural and societal world we live in, mentioning phenomena like secularisation, individualism, and consumer culture as important factors.<sup>79</sup> Cusack also places heavy emphasis on a narrative approach to religion. Drawing on e.g. both Pascal Boyer's evolutionary cognitive approach and Peter Berger's social constructionism, she suggests that religion has to do with a specific kind of narrative, and when studied from this point of view, 'invented' religions are just as valid as religions as their counterparts old and new which use a different strategies of legitimation.<sup>80</sup> Cusack has since developed and refined her idea of invented religions further in several publications<sup>81</sup>, and extended the theoretical basis of the category of invented religion with Robert Bellah's model of religion which, among other things, develops the meaning of play in the process, as well as builds theoretical connections between the social constructionism and cognitive theories.<sup>82</sup>

Joseph Laycock has published a brief but interesting article that examines two individual cases of parody religion, namely the Neo-American Church and Pastafarianism, in light of the modern, legal category of religion.<sup>83</sup> Drawing on e.g. Jonathan Z. Smith's ideas on how the particular historical concept of religion has been made into a second-order descriptive category, Laycock focuses on the political

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 35–36.

<sup>79</sup> Cusack 2010, 8–18.

<sup>80</sup> Cusack 2010, 18–25.

<sup>81</sup> See for example Cusack & Sutcliffe (eds.) 2016; Cusack 2013. It is noteworthy from the perspective of this study that in both later works Cusack has left CFSM out of her selection of examples. She also discusses parody in relation to the category of invented religions in a podcast interview published on Religious Studies Project, see Cusack 2012.

<sup>82</sup> Cusack 2016, 10–25.

<sup>83</sup> Laycock 2013.



implications of this second-order categorisation of religion and shows that, in essence, parody religions are a by-product of this “invention of religion”.<sup>84</sup> Laycock examines the ways in which both Neo-American Church and Pastafarians have launched campaigns in which “the legal system was used to gain a public forum for a conversation about the criteria of religion and its privileged status in Western democracies”.<sup>85</sup> He considers the function of these movements to be what he names “command to compare”; parody is used to highlight and question the power structure that makes use of the political category of religion.<sup>86</sup> Laycock also points out that adherents to parody religions typically also exhibit a certain view on what religion really is about.<sup>87</sup> Laycock’s views come quite close to some of the aspects I wish to examine in this thesis, and I will be addressing them in more detail in the chapter on theoretical framework.

Two most recent scholarly works on Pastafarianism I have found are from year 2017. Jacopo Ranzato’s Master’s thesis is based on his ethnographical research on Pastafarian communities in Italy, more specifically in the Padua region.<sup>88</sup> As his materials and his thesis are in Italian, I have not been able to examine either in much depth, although sharing information and perspectives with Ranzato has been very helpful. Ranzato’s work is to my knowledge the first in-depth ethnographical approach to a Pastafarian community that does not focus on online interaction. Most studies that deal with Pastafarianism, including my own, focus on textual sources, media accounts, and examination of websites and other virtual environments. However, Pastafarianism is changing, and it is by no means limited to virtual environments or texts. Studying the performative, affective, material, lived reality of Pastafarianism is a crucial contribution to understanding the movement.

Apart from studying Pastafarianism from the point of view of religion, at least one scholar has also studied it from the perspective of Atheism. Ethan G. Quillen’s chapter titled “The Satirical Sacred: New Atheism, Parody Religion, and the Argument from Fictionalization” in Cotter, Quadrio and Tuckett’s (eds.) *New Atheism – Critical*

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 21.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 20.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 25.

<sup>88</sup> Ranzato 2017.

*Perspectives and Contemporary Debates*. As the name suggests, Quillen approaches Pastafarianism from the viewpoint of atheism. Taking a discursive approach, Quillen examines the Pastafarian narrative next to Russell's teapot, Sagan's invisible dragon, Invisible Pink Unicorn and the Church of Bacon. Quillen sees these as representative of a specific type of Atheist discursive device aimed at criticising certain religious tenets. He names this discursive device "argument from fictionalisation".<sup>89</sup>

Quillen's approach persuasively connects Pastafarianism to a very specific atheist discourse. Pastafarianism certainly has a strong association with discourse(s) on atheism, and the style of parody employed in Henderson's writings is very similar to the other examples Quillen examines. However, Quillen's point of view is reasonably narrow. Pastafarianism has sides to it that fall beyond the focus of his study. Quillen himself seems to note something to this effect when he writes that "However, -- FSM seems to exist somewhere between satire and genuine belief".<sup>90</sup> Quillen does not elaborate on this remark, so it is hard to say with any certainty what he is referring to exactly. He also notes elsewhere in the chapter that "[t]he discourse, then, of Henderson's criticism is a curious sort of parody that, to his credit, he has balanced between sincerity and mockery".<sup>91</sup> In my view, both remarks in part reflect the way Henderson is subtly balancing different discourses on religion in his writing – a topic I will be discussing in some more detail later on. For the time being, let me conclude by saying that in my view it is this in part this balancing act that makes Pastafarianism so open for many kinds of uses and does not necessarily confine it to only certain kinds of discourses on religion and non-religion or atheism. Quillen correctly states that "we can -- locate within its language a distinct a-theological position".<sup>92</sup> Still, this position is neither the only one to be found, nor is it univocal (and Quillen has not argued that it would be).

All this is not to say that these ambiguous elements would make Pastafarianism 'not atheism'. It makes sense to study Pastafarianism and its discursive connections with both atheism and religion, along with other relevant terms. The aim of my study is not

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<sup>89</sup> Quillen 2017, 196.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 212.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 209.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

to try and measure which connections are somehow strongest or most relevant. Pastafarianism lends itself to different uses and seems indeed to reside somewhere in that slippery middle ground between more established discursive constellations around ‘atheism’ and ‘religion’.

Niels Valdemar Vinding has written an introductory article on Pastafarianism in the 2014 yearbook of University of Copenhagen’s Department of Cross-cultural and Regional Studies.<sup>93</sup> The title and theme of the yearbook is *Monstre* (“Monster”) and the article especially focuses on the figure of Flying Spaghetti Monster.<sup>94</sup> Vinding frames Pastafarianism reasonably straightforwardly as non-religious criticism of religion:

With the sarcasm that permeates the entire project, it is hard to imagine that Pastafarianism is ever becoming a true religion, whatever it means.<sup>95</sup>

He concludes by claiming that Pastafarianism “moves far into the grey area between real and fictional”<sup>96</sup> and states without further ado that

[I]t would be a categorical problem if one began to identify the caricature with its object and actually regard pastafarianism as religion.<sup>97</sup>

To summarise, although studies on Pastafarianism are few, it has already been approached from many viewpoints, starting from the particular political context it originated in to the virtual context that made possible its rapid spread and development, ending with an ethnographical, participatory study on the activity of a Pastafarian community. Interestingly, it is often the case that researchers leave open the possibility that Pastafarianism, or parody religion in general, could be considered somehow “real”, but often do not develop this idea further. Next, I will turn to outlining my own approach to this topic and the questions I wish to answer.

## 1.4 Research setting and questions

### 1.4.1 Research questions

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<sup>93</sup> Vinding 2014.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 99. This article does not include references, but the article by Johnston and van Horn has been mentioned in the literature list at the end of the article.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 98. Translated from Danish by Author.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. Translated from Danish by Author.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. Translated from Danish by Author.

What I find most interesting about Pastafarianism, and to some extent parody religions in general, is its way of highlighting, questioning, and perhaps even deconstructing existing cultural categories. Their language and actions escape many preconceived notions of what religion is and what it isn't, and so they challenge researchers and public alike to critically examine their views. As Laycock (and many Pastafarians I have spoken with) say, Pastafarianism is counterintuitive in so many ways that it has the potential to set an observer thinking, not only about what counts as religion, but about the nature of the very category as well.<sup>98</sup> What does Pastafarianism and the language of its proponents tell us about the place and state of 'religion' in our society? In what way do they use, challenge, or even preserve the categories of religion and non-religion? Why? What consequences does this have?

These questions point at many directions and big discussions in the field of academic study of religion. While this, broadly speaking, is the viewpoint I am most interested in, I am not attempting to cover all directions in the present study. The question I aim to answer in this study is: How do Pastafarians construct religion and atheism in their writings and how do they locate Pastafarianism in relation to those categories?

I have chosen this aspect as the focus of my study precisely because it seems to be at the centre of the ambiguity characteristic of Pastafarianism. Given the expressed objectives that many, if not most, Pastafarians seem to subscribe to, this ambiguity may well be fully or in part intentional. Still, the intentions of Pastafarian practitioners are not of particular interest to me. Rather, I focus on the language Pastafarians use, whatever their goal in doing so, and what potential effects – intentional or otherwise – this type of language use can have. Language here includes things like arguments but also elements that may not be as reflected and clearly defined. It is often even more important to try and read the meaningful silences – what is left unsaid and why. This is especially the case when one is trying to detect cultural background assumptions that the speaker may consider self-evident and so in no need of articulating or defending.

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<sup>98</sup> Laycock 2013, 21.

Even though I am studying the way Pastafarians locate Pastafarianism in relation to categories of religion or atheism, this should not be confused with an attempt to reveal any underlying ‘truth’ about which category Pastafarianism belongs to. Rather than asking what Pastafarianism really is or trying to locate it on one side or the other in a religion–secular-binary, my aim is to take a step back and look at Pastafarianism on its own terms. Arguably, Pastafarianism could be placed in any category, depending on the definitions employed and aspects examined. Jessie Dammes has remarked that CFSM seems to occupy a space somewhere between religion and irreligion.<sup>99</sup> To elaborate on that, I contend that Pastafarian discourse operates precisely in such a middle ground between the categories of religion and secular. As Joseph Laycock wrote (referring to Craig Martin): “this act of “picking at invisible seams [of dominant discourses]” is what parody religions do”.<sup>100</sup> How exactly do they do it? What kind of discursive resources do they draw on? This is what the present study focuses on.

At this point it may make sense to point out a few things that I am *not* focusing on in this research. First, while humour is a central part of Pastafarianism and is impossible to brush aside completely, the main focus of my work is not to dissect the particular type of humour Pastafarianism employs and its function further. Second, I am not interested in whether Pastafarianism is a ‘real religion’ or not. As I will hopefully be able to lay out in more detail in the chapter concerning theory, this question does not make much sense from the theoretical viewpoint I employ in this research. I am interested in the way ‘real religion’ is constructed by language use. I analyse choice of words, categorisation, arguments, and other such elements. I draw on discourse theoretical framework and use discourse analysis as my research. Consequently, this research is heavily text-based. There are other modes of communication than text, of course, but in this research setting I have found written accounts on Pastafarianism to be the most useful choice of material.

One might question the relevance of studying such a fringe phenomenon (after all, active Pastafarian communities don’t appear to be very big, although they have gained plenty of visibility) that could be seen as a bundle of college humour and cheap laughs

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<sup>99</sup> Dammes 2009, 35–36.

<sup>100</sup> Laycock 2013, 21 < Martin 2010, 10–31.

at the expense of religious beliefs and practices. I should think that the popularity and persistence of the movement speak for itself: Pastafarianism is far from such a straightforward and dismissible phenomenon. In fact, the willingness of some people to dismiss it in such an off-hand way is interesting in itself. What exactly is it that makes Pastafarianism not worth taking seriously? In addition, that something isn't big in terms of numbers doesn't necessarily render it inconsequential. Small-scale or marginal phenomena can well reflect wider developments in the society in which they emerge.

It is important to bear in mind that the scope of this study is quite limited. My conclusions have been drawn from a small sample of Pastafarian writings and many important sides of Pastafarianism remain unexamined. Thus, my conclusions are also preliminary – a hypothesis, if you will, that should be tested in broader research settings. An important aim of this study is then simply to provide a starting point and to lay some, hopefully interesting outlines for more extensive research in the future.

#### *1.4.2 Counterreligion?*

My first attempt to decipher Pastafarianism started with a term paper for a seminar focusing on religion in public and private sphere. The starting point of the seminar was José Casanova's monograph *Public Religions in the Modern World* in which the author introduced his critical analysis of secularisation theory and the idea of deprivatisation of religion.<sup>101</sup> In my term paper I examined Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster from this point of view. Following the argument of Egbert Ribberink, Peter Achterberg and Dick Houtman that "deprivatisation of disbelief" was observable in Western European countries<sup>102</sup> I suggested that while Pastafarianism cannot neatly be equated with either non-religiosity or anti-religiosity, it could be considered a counterreligion.<sup>103</sup> My original idea was that the first word 'counter' describes the way Pastafarianism originated and the way it constructs itself as a religion – or, more specifically, a satirical mirror image of certain traits typically associated with traditional religions – and in so doing highlights and diametrically counters religion entering the public sphere by trying

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<sup>101</sup> Casanova 1994.

<sup>102</sup> Ribberink, Achterberg and Houtman examined 14 European countries based on International Social Survey Program, Religion III, 2008 and largely confirmed the hypothesis that where the overall level of religiosity is high in the society, those non-religiously inclined are more prone to be attracted to anti-religious attitudes. Ribberink et al. 2013, 116.

<sup>103</sup> Lehtinen 2012.

to take over the same concrete and symbolic spaces. The term ‘religion’ is, obviously, much vaguer. It can refer to Pastafarianism’s self-identification as a religion, the fact that it fulfils certain formal criteria for religion, and finally also the open-endedness of the movement and the potential it has to develop towards something more three-dimensional, beyond the simple two-dimensional countering and critique. Finally, the word counterreligion is deliberately reminiscent of the term *counterculture*<sup>104</sup>, a term which can refer simply to any subculture that exhibits values and activities significantly different or opposed to those of the mainstream society, but can also refer to a style of culture in itself that is not necessarily only constructed through resistance or rejection. Here, I was also referring to Cusack’s discussion of culture jamming and counter-spectacle, which in her view are visible in Discordianism and Church of the SubGenius.<sup>105</sup> Cusack also termed these religions – as well as CFSM – a type of “religion of resistance”.<sup>106</sup>

Since producing that paper, I have left my tentative idea of counterreligion relatively untouched. Although the point of view in this research is different from the once-upon-a-time seminar paper, most importantly its focus on discursive approach to religion, one (minor) aim of my study is to re-examine the term and see whether it could still have some value as a theoretical concept describing at least some aspects of Pastafarianism.

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<sup>104</sup> The term counterculture is often considered to have been thought up by Theodore Roszak in his *The Making of a Counter Culture* published in 1969. See for example Shea, F. X., "Reason and the Religion of the Counter-Culture", *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 66/1 (1973), pp. 95–111.

<sup>105</sup> Cusack 2010, 91–98.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* 140.

## 2 THEORETICAL GROUNDWORK

### 2.1 Social constructionism and discourse approach to religion

#### 2.1.1 *Social constructionism*

In study of religion, it is common to define the term ‘religion’ in some way. This makes sense, as in scholarly work it is important to be clear about your concepts. Apart from various working definitions or heuristic uses of the term, many scholars agree that defining religion is a difficult exercise; definitions of religion often run the risk of either excluding important sides of religious phenomena or becoming so broad they lose their analytical power. In the context of this study, however, I take a different approach. Instead of defining religion and working from there, I will focus on analysing how others define and use the term. In this section, I will describe the basic epistemological groundwork of my approach to the topic under scrutiny.

My approach is based on social constructionism. The term and basic idea derive from Berger and Luckmann’s work in *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966) but many others have since contributed to this approach. As an interpretative framework, social constructionism refers to a certain view on the workings of our social world, the way in which it is constructed, and the crucial role language has in all this. Many research approaches and methods fall under this broad interpretative framework. Borrowing from Craig Martin<sup>107</sup>, I would highlight the following as typical, widely shared assumptions:

1. Language does not simply represent the real world out there. Rather, the way we use language constructs the world for us. As Craig Martin has described it, “[w]ords are tools that humans use to delimit from the stuff of the world what is of interest to them”.<sup>108</sup> Language is a set of distinctions that we use to make sense of the world around us, and it guides us to pick out certain ‘things’ and distinctions, and to ignore others.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Martin 2010, 13–17. Martin introduces four basic assumptions regarding the nature of language. Even though I am also presenting a list of four assumptions, the fourth one does not follow Martin’s list. Martin’s fourth assumption deals with the difference between definitions and descriptions. I find it more important here to emphasise the meaning of power relations in defining what contents of words become accepted and widely circulated – a theme Martin also addresses elsewhere in the same study.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. 13–14.



2. Words only have an arbitrary, contract-based relationship to the things they represent. Further, the meanings of the words we use are not fixed. They change over time and in different contexts. Furthermore, there are always differing, competing ways of defining a given word.<sup>110</sup>
3. These variable ways of using words is all there is to them. There is no natural ‘essence’ behind a word, or a meaning ultimately more ‘true’ than others.<sup>111</sup>
4. Even though the way we use language constructs the world for us, the result of this process is neither untrue, nor random. Even if something is socially constructed, this does not mean it is not true, even though the intuitive idea of what truth means may need some revising. In addition, even though there is no “intrinsically right or wrong use” of a term, this does not mean that anything goes. What goes depends on the community in question, and what it is willing to accept as valid knowledge. These limits to what can be said and understood as meaningful are constructed historically, in the presence of and under the influence of power relations.<sup>112</sup>

To relate this to our term of interest, religion has to do with our language and cultural categories that we collectively use to make sense of the world around us and communicate with each other. Seen as such a category, religion can be defined in various – arguably endless – ways. And the understanding of what the word ‘religion’ means changes over time. Still, the content of the term does not change at random, but as part of certain historical processes and power relations. As Peter van Rooden, Talal Asad<sup>113</sup>, and Jonathan Z. Smith<sup>114</sup> among others have argued, religion as a category is historically constructed and contingent. European colonialism, for instance, has greatly affected the way the category of ‘religion’ is being used today.<sup>115</sup> Van Rooden, for instance, criticises Steve Bruce’s defence of secularisation theory and argues that we are not experiencing a decline in religion as much as a relocation of religion.<sup>116</sup> The way the category of religion has been understood in different times has changed considerably. As Van Rooden describes it:

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<sup>110</sup> Martin 2010, 14; 22–23.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Martin 2010, 13–17; 25–29; Von Stuckrad 2016, 220; 2014, 7.

<sup>113</sup> Asad 2003.

<sup>114</sup> Smith 1998.

<sup>115</sup> See e.g. Smith 1998.

<sup>116</sup> Van Rooden 2000.

Conceptions of how true religion is to be produced, and, consequently, what real religion is, differ over time. This implies that it is impossible to measure the rise or fall of religion over longer periods.<sup>117</sup>

Consequently, it is impossible to compare the religiosity of different times, because what has been understood with the category of religion has changed. For example, in the middle ages a church without earthly power would have been inconceivable, whereas the (liberal) modern view on religion is more or less that it is a matter of private contemplation and faith.<sup>118</sup> Finally, the way we use this category has real-life implications: it is involved in creating policies, constructing institutions, and in the sharing of goods and responsibilities.<sup>119</sup>

As already noted, and as Martin also argues, all this does not mean that religion does not exist.<sup>120</sup> If it didn't, why would people everywhere be talking about religion every day? When people talk about religion, the word generally makes sense: it conveys some relevant information in a discussion, even if the exact content people attach to it varies – from person to person but also from one context to another.<sup>121</sup> But what religion 'really' is simply equals the various phenomena that we “pick up from the world”<sup>122</sup> with the word 'religion'. Theoretically, there are no limits: you *can* call anything religion. However, there are social limits. If no one understands what you're talking about, your use of the word 'religion' likely will not be accepted. At least it will not spread and become a part of the discursive field of religion in a meaningful way.<sup>123</sup> But, paraphrasing Craig Martin again, there is no ahistorical, platonic essence behind those

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<sup>117</sup> Van Rooden 2000, 177.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Teemu Taira, among others, has studied the real-life effects of classifying something as religion in various contexts. See, for instance, his work on the Finnish Wicca Movement and their (failed) attempt at gaining a recognised status in Finland in Taira 2010.

<sup>120</sup> Martin 2010, 25–29.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 22.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>123</sup> Von Stuckrad 2016, 220. As a side note, Von Stuckrad here uses Flying Spaghetti Monster as a nice example of how something can become a meaningful part of the discourse on religion: “The seriality of a discourse means that, although in principle everything can become a discourse, only those signs and communicational practices that are repeatedly visible and display a series of significant uses are likely to become a discourse. For instance, if someone comes up with the idea of a flying spaghetti monster and jokes about it among his friends in a bar, this does not necessarily constitute a discourse worthy of discussion; but if that idea takes off and gains significance in various contexts and groups, and if the idea materializes in institutions and juridical controversies, it makes sense to study the discourse on the flying spaghetti monster.”

various historical forms we are used to referring to as ‘religion’ in any given time period that we could discover.<sup>124</sup>

### *2.1.2 Discourse approach to religion*

In this research, I am approaching religion from a discursive point of view. As Teemu Taira has noted, discourse analysis has become what he names an umbrella term for many research approaches with slightly different leanings.<sup>125</sup> Discourse analysis can be seen as a theoretical framework or a toolkit that draws e.g. on the basic assumptions of social constructionism, especially the idea that language use actively affects the way we perceive reality and interact with it. There are various approaches to discourse that draw from different academic backgrounds. One perspective to their differences is to distinguish between critical discourse analysis (CDA) which focuses on power relations and hegemonic discourses and to more interpretative approaches that focus on the plurality and variability of discourses.<sup>126</sup> Teemu Taira distinguishes between textual-leaning and historical-leaning perspectives. According to Taira, the former type of approach emphasises more detailed analysis of texts. The latter focuses more on historical analysis of e.g. how the content and usage of a given concept has changed over time.<sup>127</sup> With regards to religion in particular, Taira distinguishes between approaches which focus on ‘religious discourse’ and ‘discourse on religion’, where the former deals with religious language, and the latter with the way religion as a category is used in different contexts.<sup>128</sup> As for the latter pair, my study clearly focuses on discourse on religion. I examine the various ways Pastafarians construct the category of religion, and what kind of existing discourses on religion they draw on. Although power relations are clearly present in the wider research setting, they are not the focus of my study. My work follows more the general idea of Kocku von Stuckrad’s approach in which he combines Foucauldian historical discourse analysis and Reiner Keller’s

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Taira 2013, 26.

<sup>126</sup> Valtonen 1998, 99. On CDA, see also e.g. Hjelm 2016; Fairclough 1995; 2003.

<sup>127</sup> Taira 2016a, 126.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. 125–129. Taira does not see these four approaches as entirely separate, but uses these distinctions as analytical tools for “mapping some of the relevant methodological issues in doing discursive study.” Taira 2016a, 125.

sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (SKAD)<sup>129</sup> which he describes as follows:

Rather than defining what religion 'is', my approach takes as its point of departure what people think religion is, which can be determined through an analysis of its discursive use.<sup>130</sup>

What exactly is a discourse? Just as there are many discursive approaches, there are various definitions of discourse. Teemu Taira has described discourse succinctly:

Generally, discourse is understood as consisting of statements that operate repeatedly together in forming relatively stable – but changing and changeable – meaning systems that are most effective when entangled in institutions.<sup>131</sup>

Kocku von Stuckrad has defined discourse along relatively similar lines, from the point of view of e.g. sociology of knowledge approach (SKAD) developed by Reiner Keller:

[D]iscourses are systematically organized forms of knowledge in a given community that are established, stabilized, and legitimized by communicative practices. These structures provide systems of meaning and regulate what is regarded as valid knowledge, be it explicit or tacit. Discourses are intrinsically linked to dispositives that provide the communicative 'infrastructure' in which attributions of meaning become operative.<sup>132</sup>

Taken together, these definitions convey a picture of discourse that includes language that is used together repeatedly and form something recognised as 'knowledge' in the society. Discourses on religion, for instance, are all the relatively systematic, recurrent ways in which this term is used in society; what kind of content is given to it, and how it relates to other concepts. All such relations and associations could be called a 'meaning system'.<sup>133</sup> Together they could be described as the discursive field of religion; the entirety of the ways this term is used. This includes the way we use the word 'religion' in discussions and various texts, but also how it is used implicitly in different social practices and habits that are guided by our ideas of what 'religion' is. Furthermore, discourses can become coded in different institutional, material, etc. structures. This is roughly the meaning of the term 'dispositive' that von Stuckrad uses following Michel

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<sup>129</sup> Von Stuckrad 2016, 203.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. 217.

<sup>131</sup> Taira 2016a, 126.

<sup>132</sup> Von Stuckrad 2016, 203–204.

<sup>133</sup> Jokinen et al. 1993.

Foucault<sup>134</sup>, and what Taira refers to as “meanings entangled in institutions”. Certain discourses on religion have been coded in authoritative texts like laws and regulations, where they very concretely affect the way society works, for instance, what communities can be officially labelled religions and granted rights and privileges accordingly. One institutionalisation of certain discourse on religion is the academic study of religion, although different researchers may have different ideas of what ‘religion’ means. There are nevertheless university departments, research centres, conferences and other such structures that reinforce the idea that a somehow discreet phenomenon called ‘religion’ exists and can be studied.

As explained earlier, the discursive field of religion is not a uniform place because we use the term religion in different ways. Although in principle religion, just like any category, is empty and possible to fill with any kind of content, there are restrictions to what can become part of the wider discourse in a meaningful way. It is clear that some ways of using the term ‘religion’ are more influential and widely spread than others. There are limits in place on what can be accepted to wider circulation. These limits are partially drawn by the history of the concept – what kind of content has been accepted before – and power relations. Those who participate in a given discursive field are almost never on an equal footing. Some have more power in the society than others to define how a given word should be understood. Sometimes a particular set of attributes attached to a word can become so dominating that they become self-evident, at least to most people. They start looking ‘natural’, simply the only possible way to define a given word. Such discourses are sometimes referred to as hegemonic.<sup>135</sup>

In this research, I analyse the way Pastafarians take part in the discursive field of religion. I examine what different discourses on religion can be constructed from the language they use. In my view, Pastafarianism can be used as a lens through which one can observe the increasing fluidity or relative openness of the discursive field of religion. As Teemu Taira has written,

[w]e are experiencing a reflexive moment in the negotiations of the boundaries of the discourse on ‘religion’ – [i]n other words, individuals,

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<sup>134</sup> Von Stuckrad 2014, 11.

<sup>135</sup> Hjelm 2016, 22; see also Martin 2010.

groups, and institutions are forced to rethink what counts as religion or what is permitted under the label of religion.<sup>136</sup>

Not only has the number of alleged stakeholders in the matter multiplied, there is also an increasing awareness of the arbitrary, or at least open-ended, category of religion, and its historical roots. Pastafarians, for instance, seem well versed in arguments questioning certain ways of defining religion – or the process of defining religion (as a political category) in general. In addition, they are often acutely aware of the very real consequences of this labelling, materialising, for instance, as financial privileges or state-sanctioned privilege of representation in public education.<sup>137</sup>

Examining Pastafarianism from a discourse point of view makes two things possible. First, it allows me to shift the focus away from whether Pastafarianism qualifies as a real religion or not. Second, shifting the focus to the way Pastafarians treat the category of religion I can (to an extent) avoid using as analytical tools the exact categories that I'm attempting to study. Despite all the insightful and useful ideas that one can come up with, I contend that a study employing these same distinctions that make Pastafarianism seem counterintuitive, perhaps to 'resolve' Pastafarianism, will end up reinforcing the same distinctions – and critically examining them is exactly what should be done to better understand what is going on with Pastafarianism and the discursive field of religion in general. This requires that these distinctions be suspended.

One important aspect to consider is the effect this approach has on how researchers view their own position and actions in conducting their study. It is important to take into account that when a researcher conducts a study on a given topic, her or his speech is inevitably part of the discourse under examination. Von Stuckrad, for instance, has written on the “double bind of discourse research”.<sup>138</sup> One of the effects von Stuckrad's take on discourse analysis (as well as many others') is that researchers must acknowledge their involvement in the discourse they are examining. They must also consider the power relations at play of which they also are a part of. Researchers are not

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<sup>136</sup> Taira 2016a, 126.

<sup>137</sup> Pastafarians most likely have various target audiences, ranging from like-minded people and potential new members to general audience and state authorities or legislative bodies. In addition, an element of identity production is a possible function alongside trying to convince different audiences of certain arguments. Studying which arguments are activated in which specific context would be a very interesting task.

<sup>138</sup> Von Stuckrad 2016, 216–218.

somehow set apart from the rest of the world. The way academics define religion influences the outside world. Although by no means uncontested, academics have a strong position of power when what counts as ‘valid knowledge’ about a certain topic is negotiated.<sup>139</sup> Teemu Taira has pointed this out very clearly in his article on the (unsuccessful) legalisation campaign of Wicca practitioners in Finland.<sup>140</sup>

I agree with von Stuckrad when he argues that researchers should actively reflect on their own position in producing definitions and scientific knowledge. First, we as scholars represent an institution that is a product of a history, and we do what we do based on certain inherited framework and the knowledge horizon it permits. We have also inherited cultural assumptions and operate within discursive formations that we can never be entirely even aware of.<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, the studies we conduct and the definitions we formulate are a part of the discursive field of religion, and when we construct certain “discursive groupings” we actively choose to produce them – they are not objects lying around to be found. We also need to convince others that the groupings we have chosen to construct are relevant.<sup>142</sup>

Although I am not conducting a historical study, the idea of being part of the same discourse is very much present in my work. Pastafarianism is a glaring example of the fact that we as researchers are not operating in a vacuum. Pastafarians are tinkering with the understanding of what the word ‘religion’ means in contemporary Western societies. Therefore, although my primary aim is not to analyse academic discourses related to Pastafarianism or the issues connected with it, I will introduce some scholarly discussions that both open up Pastafarianism’s perceived contradictions as well as take part in constructing a discursive space where Pastafarianism can be addressed as an object of study for study of religion. I will also pay attention to whether and how Pastafarians address similar problems, and whether they choose to employ similar arguments.

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<sup>139</sup> Von Stuckrad 2016, 216–217.

<sup>140</sup> Taira 2013.

<sup>141</sup> Von Stuckrad 2016, 220.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

### 3 METHOD, MATERIALS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

#### 3.1 Research method and analysis

##### 3.1.1 *Research method*

The theoretical framework and approach I have adopted for this research deals with the theoretical concepts of discourse and discursive field of religion. I will therefore analyse the way Pastafarians use language to construct religion. While discourse analysis is not the only research method available for researchers approaching their object of study from this perspective, I have chosen to employ it as a method of analysing my data.

As discussed in the previous chapter, discourse analysis is far from a uniform, clearly defined methodical tool that could be applied as a standard procedure in any research setting. More systematised and structured discourse analytical tools have been developed, but it remains typical to tailor an approach that suits each individual research setting. Following Teemu Taira's description, discourse analysis can be understood as a "loose theoretical framework" that informs the questions the researcher wants to ask and the approach he or she subsequently takes in examining the material.<sup>143</sup> This is the way I also use discourse analysis in this research. Rather than looking for a strictly predefined method, I have combined concepts and analytical distinctions to reach a perspective that would provide an adequate precision level and fit the aim of my study. In this, I have mostly used the works of Teemu Taira, Kocku von Stuckrad, and Craig Martin, to whom I mostly referred in the previous chapter.

I will describe the materials I have analysed in more detail further on. For now, suffice it to say that I analyse texts on Pastafarianism written by Bobby Henderson, one introductory animation film on Pastafarianism, as well as interview responses from 20 European Pastafarians. I have taken the same general approach to each set of materials although, as they are different in their original format, there are some differences in emphasis. The most important difference is that unlike the texts published on the web page of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, the responses I have received from European Pastafarians are not naturally occurring data. They are responses to my

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<sup>143</sup> Taira 2013, 27.



specific questions, which means that these questions must also be taken into account in the analysis. The overall context (research about Pastafarianism), my choice of words, expressions, and tone all influence the texts the respondents produce. It is therefore important to include the questions asked in the analysis as well.

### *3.1.2 Analysing process*

In general, the process of examining the material under examination has followed the same process. Everything starts with reading, taking in a general picture of the complete text, before starting to examine the details. This process is repeated several times – from overall picture to details and back. Especially in analysing the responses to my thematic questions I have cross-read the responses. I started by reading each person's full response together with the question-and-answer pairs one at a time. This was followed by a more in-depth examination of terminology, and often included checking translations and (especially German) terminology. After this, I read all responses question by question, and identified elements both common and divergent. Moving between the two in reading has hopefully allowed me to compare the responses being sensitive to my own question formulation, but also to consider the bigger picture of each person's response - typically what they write under one heading is linked to what they say under the next one.

This close reading is a first step in discourse analysis, which requires me to focus on certain features in the responses, such as connotations and associations, distinctions, inclusions and exclusions. This time, I have especially been interested in the way

1. 'religion' or different 'religions' are constructed, including what is posited as their counter pole;
2. How Pastafarianism is described, and;
3. How these are related to one another.

The concrete process of analysing the responses has consumed a regrettable amount of paper. Still, I have found paper, scissors, and pencils are the tools for this sort of work. Some methods have been relatively simple, like compiling descriptions/adjectives related to different terms (such as 'religion', 'pastafarianism', or 'atheism' to name some)

and see what kind of positive or negative associations are related to them and what kind of relationship is constructed between different categories in this way. I have borrowed the idea for the lists below from Craig Martin<sup>144</sup>, although perhaps as a relatively free adaptation:

Religion	Pastafarianism
old and dusty organizations	open-minded and joyful
ancient customs	100% non-dogmatic
Intolerant	fun
	doesn't judge people

These are just some examples from the responses, but this kind of strong oppositional construction was detectable throughout: 'traditional religion' is either explicitly or implicitly depicted as more or less the opposite of Pastafarianism, the former being 'intolerant' and 'old and dusty', the latter 'open-minded' and 'fun'. Similarly, I have divided the material into shorter sequences and in the next column formulated the message in the way I understand it. Sometimes this has included explicating the implicit allusions present in the text.

**Table 1** Example of analysing process. *For larger version of this table, see appendix 3.*

Response to question	Close reading
1 Pastafarians don't tell people what to do	Pastafarianism is not authoritarian
2 as we believe that everyone has some kind of ethical compass in ourselves.	Individuals know what is right. [Implicit:] consequently, no authority is needed to define this for them.
3 Add to this that our Deity the FSM doesn't demand worship, sacrifices or money	[implicit:] there are other, in some way comparable communities in which these things are required (perhaps by 'deities') and this is undesirable.
4 He just wants for you to be happy and	[opposite to previous:] the FSM wants you to 'be happy' instead of worshipping, making sacrifices, and/or giving him money in some form.
5 let others be happy in their own way	Different people can have their own way of being happy; this should be allowed. [liberal, individualistic; positive]
6 without forcing your belief on them.	'Forcing' your beliefs on someone else is not desirable [imposition of one's own beliefs on others; negative]
7 In this we differ from almost all religions and philosophies on Earth.	Explicitly expressing what was implicitly stated already: Pastafarianism is different from 'religions and philosophies': * Others 'tell people what to do' - they don't * Others demand worship, sacrifices, or money - they don't * Others are not content with everyone 'just being happy' - they are * Others wish to impose their views on others - they don't.

In the case of Matt Tillman's animation on Henderson's web page, I have done the same but included a description of the visual elements in their own column to examine both levels. Going through the responses in this way has helped in tracing certain recurring features in the responses, as well as pointing at where respondents are using different types of arguments and where they might be drawing on different discourses. From the

<sup>144</sup> Martin 2012.

above extract, for instance, I could derive a description of Pastafarianism as anti-authoritarian, individualistic, and liberal. "Almost all religions and philosophies", then, are described as very much the opposite: they are dominating and controlling, and willing to impose their set of beliefs on others. Finding the same (or different) sort of terms associated with e.g. 'pastafarianism' and 'religion' elsewhere in the responses has allowed me to build certain recurrent models of 'religion'. These I have then taken apart, divided to subcategories, and put back together numerous times. In this I have been guided by the questions I set out to look the answers for. This process of analysing and looking for recurrent patterns has not been a one-way one. Rather, it has been a whole lot of back and forth; I have read the responses many times and shifted my focus as my understanding of the material has developed.

There is always a part of analysis of this sort that escapes attempts at absolute systematisation. Analysing discourses relies on the cultural background knowledge of the researcher. It is also important to note that the discourses I am identifying are my constructions, based on my reading of the material. This is not to say that my interpretation would be somehow invalid; it is based on the material I have chosen and I have studied it as thoroughly as possible. Still, any reading, no matter how systematic, is always partial. Something may have been lost in translation as well. I can only ground my arguments in the materials examined and attempt to do so in a way transparent enough to make examining and criticising my outcomes possible.<sup>145</sup>

## 3.2 Materials

### 3.2.1 Overview

I use three kinds of materials in constructing my research. The primary sources I analyse are the following:

1. Bobby Henderson's writings on his web page dedicated to the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster. I have analysed one subpage, the 'About' section, which also includes a short introductory animation produced by Matt Tillman.

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<sup>145</sup> Von Stuckrad 2016, 220–221.

2. (Mostly) written responses to open thematic interview questions from Pastafarians across Europe.

In addition, I use a selection of scholarly works that are relevant to Pastafarianism in constructing a context for analysing Pastafarians' own discourses. In the first part of my section on analysis I examine the reasons Pastafarianism appears so counterintuitive, but also how scholars of religion have been opening up new ways of examining religion (and secular or non-religion) that also seem to make space for Pastafarianism in the discursive field of religion. I have titled this chapter "theoretical context". I am not using these academic texts as explanations or interpretations of Pastafarianism. They do not represent a 'better' or 'truer' knowledge on Pastafarianism but simply illustrates features of academic discourse on some of the relevant themes. I also wish to show certain similarities between academic and Pastafarian discourses.

I have chosen the scholarly works examined based on the way they illustrate the kind of academic discourses on religion that can be connected to why Pastafarianism comes across as a problematic case to begin with. Pastafarianism has to do with far-reaching discussions in the field of study of religion and I have certainly omitted plenty of important research in these areas, but it is not my aim to offer a comprehensive history of a scholarly debate but rather illustrate the types of ideas that could be connected to Pastafarianism and similar phenomena, and there are practical limits I must abide to.

### *3.2.2 Electronically published sources*

Bobby Henderson is the founder of the CFSM, and he still seems reasonably active in following up on Pastafarians around the world and updating his website on the topic. Even though there is no formal quality control for Pastafarianism and there are many interpretations of it to go around, Henderson's views probably carry some weight. In addition, many of my respondents mentioned Henderson's writings to be the starting point for their interest in Pastafarianism, and it is interesting to see whether Henderson's views are reflected in the answers of the European Pastafarians. I analyse the "About" section on Henderson's website The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster ([www.venganza.org](http://www.venganza.org)). The site also features a blog with e.g. news from different Pastafarian communities, a "Join Us" page explaining how it is possible to become a

Pastafarian, “Propaganda” page that includes plenty of flyers, posters, and other material for spreading the word, a section for (assumedly satirical) “Sightings” in which pictures of various perceived manifestations of the FSM are posted, “Hate mail” which includes, according to the hashtag used, “hate mail and concerned criticism”, and “Ordinations” introducing the option of becoming a Pastafarian minister by purchasing an official ordination certificate. These ordination certificates cost \$25 (including shipping), and the name of the person ordained will be added to an official registry of Ordained FSM ministers. In addition, the website offers the possibility to join a mailing list, take part in a Kiva social sponsoring team, and purchase the Gospel of the Flying Spaghetti Monster and several types of Pastafarian merchandise. Users can comment on the items published on the blog, and the discussion seems relatively active; most recent posts are dated only a few days ago.<sup>146</sup>

The site includes plenty of material, textual and visual. I have chosen to focus on the About-section since, well, it is the About-section; the place where people seeking basic information about the movement would probably be directed to. As I am interested in the Pastafarian discourse on Pastafarianism, this seems like a natural place to start. The About-section is a reasonably short page, consisting of a couple of paragraphs of text, pictures of various Pastafarian activities and handicrafts, driving license photos with pasta strainers among others (these are presented as possible ways to join in the movement and spread the word), one introductory animation, and a section of questions and answers about Pastafarianism. It also includes a link to the open letter Henderson originally sent to the Kansas School Board.

### 3.2.3 Interviews

Interviews are not necessarily the first choice of material for this sort of study, as many discourse analysts would prefer naturally occurring data in order not to affect the way the language they examine is used.<sup>147</sup> It is true that the setting (an interview for an academic study) and the questions I ask directly affect the way people formulate their responses. I do not think this is an insurmountable problem, but it is something to be aware of – and I do think it rules out the highest level of precision in analysis. For

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<sup>146</sup> The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster.

<sup>147</sup> On interviews in discourse analysis, see e.g. Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000.

instance, it is not necessarily possible to analyse very fine differences between choices of words since the choices I have made may have steered the choice of the respondents. I have consciously tried to formulate the questions in such a way that they would represent the perceptions people might have regarding the movement, in order to get to their way of explaining things – their own discourse on Pastafarianism and religion. Of these, I have gotten an idea from reading Henderson’s website, but also various news articles and commentaries on the movement.

After my initial search through literature and various internet platforms, I contacted Pastafarian groups in 20 European countries by sending an email to their public email addresses. I received some responses from around Europe this way, and some of the respondents connected me with others. Ultimately, I received 20 responses from Austria (1), Belgium (1), Denmark (1), Germany (1), Italy (9), The Netherlands (1)<sup>148</sup>, Norway (1), Poland (1), Spain (1), Russia (1), and Turkey<sup>149</sup> (2). These responses have been archived in University of Turku Archives of School of History, Culture and Arts Studies, TKU-collection. Surnames of the respondents have been removed from the materials. Most of the respondents were founders, leading figures, group moderators, and/or active members of the/a Pastafarian community in their country. The Belgian respondent makes an exception here, as he claimed to have no connection whatsoever with any groups of Pastafarians. In addition, especially from Italy I received responses from people who described themselves as average members with no special roles. It is important to note that there were big differences between communities in terms of how organised they were, ranging from Facebook groups to official associations with formal structures.

I asked all respondents to answer 13 open questions. The questions were divided to three parts, the first of which included questions about basic background information of the respondent, the second about facts and figures about Pastafarianism in the respondent’s country, and the third about personal reflections on Pastafarianism. I

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<sup>148</sup> The respondent from the Netherlands was not actively involved with the newly officially registered *Kerk van het Vliegend Spaghettimonster* during the time of the interview. He was more active on Facebook groups and international Pastafarian networks, such as the Council of European Pastafarian Churches. TKU/O/18/15, 1:7.

<sup>149</sup> I am aware that, in some contexts, Turkey’s status as a European country could be disputed, but I do not believe this is the right place for solving the matter. For practical reasons, I have decided to follow the classification by Eurovision Song Contest.

offered the respondents the possibility either to answer my questions in writing via email, or to conduct an interview via some social media service, e.g. Skype. Most respondents chose to reply in writing. Only three interviews were conducted partially or completely via Skype or Facebook Messenger. In addition, I had a couple of more informal discussions with some of the respondents via the aforementioned services.

Two of the respondents did not mention their age. The ages of the others varied between 16 and 65 years, most of them reporting to be in their early to mid-thirties. The mean age of the respondents is 36 years, median 33.5. All in all, the people I was in contact with were typically reasonably young adults, more commonly male although there were also female respondents. I did not specifically enquire about gender in the interview, so my information on gender distribution is rather vague. Still, out of the 20 respondents, two reported being female. Two others I presume were based on their names. The rest I presumed to be male based on their names.

### 3.3 Scope and limitations

Pastafarianism an ever-changing, free-form movement. Rather than as a formal structure, it exists as a networked constellation that consists of online and offline networks, informal groups and formal communities, individual adherents, and a wealth of internet memes. This means that one must be very cautious about any generalisations. It is important to remember that Pastafarianism could look radically different when perceived from another angle, with other materials.

All my choices regarding research material naturally have an effect the scope of the study. First, I have used internet for literally everything from finding background information about the movement to contacting potential interviewees and interviewing them. This, of course, leaves out any Pastafarians who have no or little contacts online. This is likely to be a minor issue, since Pastafarianism seems to reign in the virtual realm, and previous research into the matter suggests a heavy emphasis on Pastafarians

being active and gathering on the Internet. And, as Carole Cusack has noted, “it is increasingly difficult to disentangle offline from online lives”.<sup>150</sup>

I have found interviewees both through contact details found online and later by using the snowball method. Especially the latter may mean that my respondents are part of the same social network that might share very similar views on Pastafarianism that others outside this network do not share. I have attempted to avoid this kind of being stuck in one network only by spreading my research in different countries and trying to contact respondents through various means. Restricting my search of interviewees to Europe is a limitation to the scope of the study. It should also be noted that it is by no means a clear-cut distinction. Many online communities have an international following and individuals are connected across any country borders. Still, many of these communities name and organise themselves along the lines of nationality, region, or language, and operate in the national or regional language. This makes sense especially when building a structured community that can also take up the challenge of pursuing an official recognition. Many Pastafarians are active in several communities simultaneously, and members may live abroad but wish to be connected to the group in the country of their origin. Already in my small group of respondents, many were living outside their country of origin, typically in another European country.

Another important limitation that needs to be addressed is the language used. I have contacted all my respondents in English and almost all correspondence has been in English. This presents at least two limitations. First, the people who do not speak English or do not feel confident using it probably have not responded. Second, to my knowledge English is not a native language to any of my interviewees, nor is English my native language. This creates some noise in the material and affects the analysis by ruling out the highest level of precision in the analysis. Only one respondent chose to reply in German instead of English. A notable exception with regards to the language question is Italy, where members of the local church took up the task of first translating my questions into Italian, and then translating the responses written in Italian into

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<sup>150</sup> Cusack 2017, 167.



English.<sup>151</sup> Together with the fact that the responses from Italians account for a third of the responses I have received altogether, this mixes the waters somewhat. With regards to the first question, the possible exclusion of those who do not feel confident with their English skills, this arguably makes things a little better. For the second, it may make them worse, because the more layers of translation are between the respondent and the researcher, the more possibility there is for the expressions to be muddled.<sup>152</sup>

Another aspect to consider is the fact that the context of an academic interview and the questions I have asked are likely to have influenced the way people have responded. My questions do reflect pre-existing ideas of the movement. I have chosen certain themes and terminology and it is possible that these are not the most important ones to Pastafarians themselves. I have tried to keep my questions as open-ended as possible, while still offering some examples and possible points of view to help the interviewees to get a hold of the question. Further than that, it is simply important not to bracket out the effect of the questions in the analysis, but examine them as well.

Finally, as many Pastafarians do seem to have an explicit agenda in advancing the idea that their religion is a valid one, they may have perceived academic research into the movement as a potential place to further their cause. Theoretically, it is also possible that they were all simply trying to pull my leg. I do not see this as a problem. I have explicitly focused on texts that may have explaining and promoting Pastafarian views as their aim, because I am especially interested in the arguments put forward in such a context, explaining Pastafarianism to outsiders – rather than, say, ideas of religion that Pastafarians would discuss among themselves. I am interested in what kind of ideas are considered self-evident, and what arguments persuasive. The ‘sincerity’ of the writers is not of importance, nor am I trying to uncover what they ‘really’ think. This does not mean that I consider their explanations of Pastafarianism as somehow insincere or rhetoric motivated by something else than real convictions. This sort of questions

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<sup>151</sup> I must once more express my gratitude to the Chiesa Pastafariana Italiana members who undertook this task.

<sup>152</sup> I have also received the original Italian documents from the Italian Church, and I have gone through them with an Italian-speaker, who helped me in confirming that the translations roughly match the original texts. (No offense to the good people from CPI, who I know did a good job – this is a matter of academic prudence.)

simply cannot be answered in this research setting and are not relevant with regards to the questions I try to answer.

### 3.4 Ethical considerations and positioning

One level of ethical consideration is the overall validity and reliability of the research. An absolute minimum requirement for any study to be ethical is that it is rigorously aiming at being a truthful and accurate description of the phenomenon under study, and that the research setting is carefully planned with a keen eye to avoiding error in validity and/or reliability of the research. The scope and limitations of the study must also be made transparent. Another important point to consider is how researchers treat their object of study. Researchers should always respect the integrity and freedom of human being. In this regard, my study has not been very problematic. As for the academic material and Bobby Henderson's writings, these are published materials freely available. I have not used texts from e.g. discussion boards or forums that require registration, as I consider these to be such semi-private virtual spaces where one should in my view request a permission before using the texts.<sup>153</sup>

When I approached possible interviewees, I laid out as clearly as possible who I was, what my background was, as well as the purpose of my study. On the question sheet I indicated that any questions could always be left unanswered. I also explained how I was going to refer to the interviews and interviewees in the final text, and that the final text would be published online. I offered the respondents the chance to be completely anonymised if they so wished. No one asked for this, but some used their Pastafarian names. For consistency, I will not be using anyone's full name. I will send the finished research to my respondents as well.

The responses I received were very positive. Most people seemed happy to answer my questions and offered to give further information if needed. In addition, many people offered to put me in contact with other Pastafarians. Partially to give something back to the Pastafarians who responded my questions, I have decided to write this research in

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<sup>153</sup> Kuula 2011.

English. I have also tried to write in a relatively clear language and avoid unnecessary complexity. In addition, in some cases I was asked to help with connecting Pastafarian communities across Europe to one another. Although I'm afraid I couldn't be of much assistance, I have tried to help where possible.

Apart from more concrete questions relating to research design and process, there are also broader ethical questions to be considered, such as the questions of representation. Whose voice do we choose to listen to? As the truism goes, research is never conducted in a vacuum. Scholars in cultural and social sciences are increasingly taking into account the fact that conducting research, saying something about a given phenomenon, is one type of exercise of power. As already discussed in the previous chapter, researchers have some of the authority of academia behind them, giving credence to what they choose to put on paper. What scholars say about a given topic may well have consequences – and all of them one cannot foresee. Which makes it all the more important that such aspects are considered as part of conducting research. In addition, researchers are part of the discourse they study and cannot completely suspend the pre-existing language, categories, and assumptions that we all carry with us.

This view is embedded to my theoretical background, and in part the reason why I present scholarly work also as a discursive context against which Pastafarian discourses can be mirrored. Scholars and the research papers, reports, and articles they produce are also part of the discourse under examination. As researchers we should be aware of our own position and our assumptions that unavoidably affect our choices and our interpretations. Similarly, as Von Stuckrad has written, we should be aware of the power position that the collective enterprise of academia and the discipline of study of religion has, and the effect that this historical formation has on the overall discourse on religion.<sup>154</sup> To complicate matters further, it is also important to note that we, the researchers, have not gone unnoticed by the Pastafarian community. What we say can, presumably, be used in future debates in one way or another. As Carole Cusack cites Scott McFarlane's observation in *Invented religions*:

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<sup>154</sup> See chapter 2.1.2, p. 33.

[i]t does not matter that the author could not foresee the cultural influence of his novel. Once an author creates a text, except for royalties, it belongs to the world.<sup>155</sup>

Only I don't get royalties.

How does my personal background affect my interpretation on Pastafarianism? Presumably a lot. For one thing, I am familiar with many cultural contexts (e.g. online parlance and memes) that my respondents also use. This is probably mostly an advantage when I am examining their writings. Still, it is clear that there are always undertones and references I may not pick up, and being versed in certain types of expressions may actually blind me to aspects that someone less familiar with them would see. As for personal convictions, I do not identify as Pastafarian. I have already stated that this study is not about whether Pastafarianism is a 'real religion' or not, and I hope I have been able to clarify the reasons why this would not make much sense from my theoretical perspective.

I have on occasion been asked for my opinion on whether Pastafarianism *should qualify* as a religion. Since studying Pastafarianism from the perspective of study of religion and classifying it a religion in a certain legal framework, for instance, are two different things, I interpret this as an inquiry about whether I sympathise with the Pastafarian cause or not. I do find the questions Pastafarians raise important and in need of critical examining. Is it right, for instance, that certain institutions are given special privileges because they are labelled as religion? What effects does such a practice have? Who gains, who loses? In addition, I certainly sympathise with many causes that (many) Pastafarians promote, such as equal rights for LGBT+ people. Finally, let it be said that although not strongly present in my research, in some contexts Pastafarianism does come across as very hostile towards religion in general or towards particular religions<sup>156</sup>. This I do not find particularly appealing.

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<sup>155</sup> Cusack 2010, 140 < Scott MacFarlane 2007, *The Hippie Narrative: A Literary Perspective on the Counterculture*, Jefferson NC, 97.

<sup>156</sup> Some readers may wish to argue that this sort of usage of Pastafarian imagery is not really Pastafarianism. It may well be that it is not representative of Pastafarianism. However, as Pastafarianism is a fluid constellation consisting of texts written by many authors, independent communities, endless stash of internet memes, and no authority overseeing its interpretation, the task of defining something like its 'essence' or Pastafarian 'orthodoxy' would seem like a questionable effort. Such an argument is in itself an interesting object of study, as Martin has demonstrated, see Martin 2010.

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Although my research, like any other text, “belongs to the world”, it is not my aim to criticise Pastafarians, nor to promote their ideas. I do recognise, however, that my understanding of religion as something negotiable and changing already carries with it certain deconstructive potential, not unlike the kind of deconstruction Pastafarians among others are busy with. My interest in various movements referred to as parody religions, invented religions etc. lies in what they tell us about the societies we live in, what kind of categories we use to make sense of the world around us (and simultaneously shape it towards those categories), and how these categories are renegotiated and changed. I hope that what little understanding of these matters I may be able to produce will be put to constructive use. But this is not entirely for me to decide.

## 4 ACADEMIC CONTEXT

### 4.1 What is wrong with Pastafarianism?

Pastafarianism is complicated, a “chaotic and polysemic affair”<sup>157</sup>, even paradoxical. Anecdotally, Bobby Henderson has noted that some people tend to react angrily, not so much to the more obviously funny parts, but more to the fact that somehow it doesn’t always come across as just joking around:

But what I find interesting is that when people object to the idea of Pastafarianism, it’s never with our scripture or ideas they suspect to be tongue-in-cheek. They object to the most intentional, honest, real components of our religion. It’s the times when we break from satire that we’re criticized, the times when I say something tolerant or hopeful about Christians that I’m called names. I am convinced there is a large number of people who need to believe that ours is not a legitimate religion because it can’t exist in their world view.<sup>158</sup>

Based on this remark alone it is impossible to say who the people who object and call names are, what their motives are, and how common this might be. But if we take Henderson at his word, it seems that is not necessarily the humour (or satire, as Henderson describes it) that rubs people the wrong way, but the fact that Pastafarianism seems also somehow serious.<sup>159</sup> Some people undoubtedly interpret Pastafarianism simply as an insult, others are not sure how to relate to it. But what is wrong with Pastafarianism? Why is it not considered a legitimate religion when its adherents claim it is one?

In this chapter, I examine in more detail why Pastafarianism is such an odd duck. I argue that the reason Pastafarianism is difficult to grasp derives from the fact that it contradicts widely accepted category boundaries and challenges commonly held ideas of what religion is about. For the purposes of this examination, I have identified four transgressive features or ‘problems’ with Pastafarianism. Although I call them problems, it is not my aim to solve them. They are problems from a certain perspective, and I use them to illustrate that perspective. This helps me to construct a framework for my further analysis. This includes the scholarly context, the theoretical debates that may

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<sup>157</sup> Laycock 2013, 20.

<sup>158</sup> Henderson 2011.

<sup>159</sup> In addition, it has been reported that the 2007 AAR conference organisers in San Diego received hate mail related to the panel discussion over the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster – the very same panel I have discussed in chapter 1 of this present study. Dottinga 2007.

not address Pastafarianism as such but still form part of the background against which Pastafarian discourse on religion can be examined.

Pastafarianism is often considered a parody, which is to say it is insincere and not really a real religion. This may be based on the following types of perceptions of the movement:

1. Pastafarianism is fictional or invented.
2. Pastafarianism is blatantly humorous.
3. Pastafarianism is politically motivated or a political protest.
4. Pastafarianism has connections with atheism or anti-religiosity or is an atheist project.

I do not present these statements as facts about Pastafarianism. They are examples of the kind of objections people might have, even if they are not expressed in such explicit way. Many Pastafarians, including Bobby Henderson, also discuss these themes in a way that makes it evident that they are familiar with them and feel the need to address them – usually to refute them or to question their relevance in defining whether Pastafarianism is a religion or not. But why are these statements problematic? I argue that this is because they correspond with the following commonly held assumptions or stereotypes<sup>160</sup> of what religion is about:

1. *Religion is about faith or belief.* Openly human origins of Pastafarianism and the fictional character of its scripture render it a misfit.
2. *Religious beliefs are serious, sometimes described as 'ultimate concerns'.* In conjunction with the real faith requirement, the objects of this faith are somehow considered profoundly important and treated with reverence and respect. Humour in this context implies irreverence, profanity, and dishonesty.
3. *Religion is a private matter.* It is not public or political, at least not essentially. Even in situations where religious actors do enter public arena and act in ways considered 'political', a private and apolitical core substance of religion, belief, remains. Pastafarianism started as a reaction to a decision of a type of public official. It acts publicly, and it often demonstrates clear political aims.

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<sup>160</sup> I have compiled this list myself for this study, but the ideas I present on it are not my own. I will address them in more detail in due course, with references to relevant scholarly work.

4. *Religion is about belief in god or some kind of supernatural reality.* Pastafarianism and atheism often seem to overlap. Atheism is, literally, about *not* believing in any gods, afterlife, or other such things. Often atheism is even anti-religious. As many Pastafarians are also professed Atheists, they cannot at the same time be considered ‘religious’.

To summarise, ‘real religion’ would then be something like an individual’s private, profound, and serious faith, usually in god or supernatural entity. Further, to put it in Sean McCloud’s words, “‘true religion’ is about private beliefs that are rational and consistent.”<sup>161</sup> But where does this idea come from? In the following, I will try and address this idea of religion from the four different perspectives mentioned and describe some of the ways scholars of religion have addressed the issue and opened up new ways of seeing ‘religion’.

Obviously, these statements are or are not true depending on the definition of religion employed. As we have already established, in principle it is possible to define ‘religion’ in any way. In practice, certain views are more prevalent than others. In a society where the word ‘religion’ is used, people tend to have an idea of what kind of things it approximately means. Although there is no clearly formulated definition of ‘religion’, people more or less understand one another when they use the word, even though the particulars vary in different contexts. Craig Martin calls this everyday use of a word colloquial use. He also notes that this kind of colloquial use of the word religion is polythetic. This means that there are several incommensurable definitions of religion to go around.<sup>162</sup> And like the word religion itself, colloquial, polythetic understanding, the ‘common knowledge’ about religion, has developed in specific historical context. For instance, it has been heavily influenced by certain forms of Christianity.<sup>163</sup> As Stoddard and Martin have noted, “many contemporary views about religion have their origin in

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<sup>161</sup> McCloud 2017, 17.

<sup>162</sup> Martin points out that this is the difficulty with reaching a satisfactory academic definition of ‘religion’: a formal definition that would catch the polythetic web of meanings in colloquial use is an impossibility precisely because there are many contradictory components included. Martin does emphasise, though, that he does not consider this to mean that religion cannot be defined. Martin 2010, 20–23. Carole Cusack also discusses polythetic definitions but more strictly in conjunction with scholarly definitions of religion in Cusack 2010, 20.

<sup>163</sup> On the early Modern origins of religion as belief system, see McCloud 2017; On religion as a private matter, see Walsh 2017; Martin 2010. On colonial encounter and its effects, see e.g. Chidester 2004; 1996.



early modern political propaganda”.<sup>164</sup> This everyday understanding of religion and the various academic, political etc. definitions of religion derived from it have been problematised by scholars of religion from many angles in recent decades. Earlier definitions more narrowly based on Judaeo-Christian traditions and colonialism have been replaced with new, often more inclusive definitions.<sup>165</sup> In the following sections I examine all four problems of Pastafarianism, the ideas about religion that create this friction, as well as the ways in which scholars of religion have addressed these problems and in so doing perhaps created more discursive resources and space for Pastafarianism as well.

#### *4.1.1 Invented religion vs. religion is about belief*

The first problematic feature I identify in Pastafarianism is that its adherents are relatively open about its invented status. Although some stick to the literal scriptural version about Pastafarianism being hundreds of years old<sup>166</sup>, many are willing to admit that Bobby Henderson in fact set the church in motion in 2005. This causes friction with the assumption that belief is a core feature of religion.

Pastafarianism is neither the first nor the only movement to raise suspicion based on its invented status. Invention, of course, is in the eye of the beholder. Depending on who one asks, various other religions and ‘heresies’ have probably always been considered invented – human-conjured, maybe frauds – if not described as coming straight from the Devil himself. More importantly, these days a modern, secular view on religion that does not subscribe to claims about supernatural origins can easily reach the conclusion that all religions are ultimately human inventions. Still, it is a common expectation that ‘real religion’ is based on ‘real faith’ and that even if a non-believing onlooker would consider the origins of the tradition in question as human invention, religious believers

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<sup>164</sup> Stoddard & Martin 2017, 10.

<sup>165</sup> One could probably list all recommended reading lists of Comparative Religion basic studies courses here. Ninian Smart, for instance, has developed a seven-feature model of “dimensions of the sacred” suggesting that these features are almost universally present in all traditions that can be considered religious, even though they do not necessarily all need to be present in all cases. See Smart 1968; 1989; 1996. See also a succinct typology of common approaches to defining religion in Martin 2010, 17–19.

<sup>166</sup> Henderson, About.

themselves are generally expected not to think, or at least speak, this way.<sup>167</sup> So for many the problem with ‘invented religion’ is not so much the fact of invention as the declaration or admitting of said invention by the adherents themselves.<sup>168</sup> Still, there are movements that are described (or describe themselves) as religious or spiritual, yet openly admit that they are based on human invention rather than, say, divine revelation.<sup>169</sup> Some are based entirely or in part on cultural products that are clearly fictional and human-made, such as fantasy novels or sci-fi films. Others may not be so clearly connected to professed works of fiction, but they may still admit, at least vaguely, that human invention is involved, and see no problem there.

But if religion is about faith or belief, what makes this phenomenon possible? How can a movement be a ‘real religion’ when the very stuff it is based on is a work of fiction, George Lucas’s Star Wars film trilogy for example? As has become apparent, questions like this lead to a slippery ground, riddled with questions concerning authenticity, invention, and creativity. Finally, what does ‘belief’ even mean, how can it be measured – and is it really a hallmark of religion? It could be argued that the idea of ‘belief’ (separated from ‘knowledge’) as a central part of religion in fact only fits certain forms of Christianity, which have been used as a prototype of constructing the modern second-order category of religion.<sup>170</sup> After all, there are traditions that do not emphasise faith in certain dogma, but other aspects – rituals and customs, for instance.

Scholars of religion and popular culture have been at the forefront of addressing such questions. Adam Possamai, for instance, has labelled religious movements based on

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<sup>167</sup> David Chidester describes this problematic requirement aptly: "All Bibles are man-made", he [Edison] held, suggesting that the basis of religious authority in every religion is not divine intervention but human invention. -- Edison placed religion in a difficult double bind: If a religion claims supernatural authority, it is lying; -- If a religion tells the truth by acknowledging it is man-made, then it is not a religion, so proponents who claim the status of religion for such an artifice are also devious frauds. Either way, religion is all bunk, --." Chidester 2005, 190.

<sup>168</sup> This point is not brought up only by scholars of religion. In fact, many adherents to religions that could be considered ‘invented’ employ the same argument, Pastafarians included. Bobby Henderson himself puts forward the argument that Pastafarianism is more legitimate as a religion precisely because it is open about its origins (unlike more time-honoured traditions).

<sup>169</sup> Cusack 2010, 1–2.

<sup>170</sup> Bruno Latour offers an interesting way to conceptualise and turn around the perceived paradox between “facts and fetishes” (which in my view could also be called “knowledge and belief”). From Latour’s point of view, this conceptual separation is a central Western myth which essentially render us incapable of perceiving how things are simultaneously ‘real’ and ‘constructed’. To illustrate this, he offers the term “factishes”. See Latour 2010; 2013.

works of popular culture “hyper-real religions”.<sup>171</sup> David Chidester has discussed “authentic fakes” in the context of American popular culture<sup>172</sup> and Markus Davidsen explores what he calls “fiction-based religions”<sup>173</sup> to name a few approaches. In this study, I make use of Carole Cusack’s work on the category of “invented religions”. In her monograph *Invented Religions. Imagination, Fiction and Faith* (2010), Cusack suggests the category of invented religions as a broad title under which she examines religions that have their roots in a work or works of acknowledged fiction – thus, movements that explicitly refuse to use the more traditional (and Christianity-based) models of legitimation.<sup>174</sup> Her examples include Discordianism, Church of the SubGenius, Jedi religion, Matrixism, The Church of All Worlds, well as The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster. All of these movements are either based on popular fiction or, as in the case of the CFMS, are otherwise openly human-made.

Cusack describes the social and cultural context in which such an inventive take on religion has emerged. She argues that this shift is due to several factors that derive from consumer culture, the modern Western valuation of novelty and innovation, and increased exposure to the variety of religious and philosophical traditions in the world.<sup>175</sup> Drawing from social constructionism of Peter Berger and cognitive theories of religion developed e.g. by Pascal Boyer, Cusack explains the appeal and validity of these movements from the point of view of an inspiring mythical narrative.<sup>176</sup> Cusack also points out that, for the adherents to such invented religions (as for much of the new spiritual activity in the contemporary West) ontological ‘reality’ of these narratives does not necessarily play a meaningful role.<sup>177</sup> From this perspective, human invention does not seem to pose an insurmountable problem to religiosity – especially not in a cultural environment where the plurality of the religious landscape makes it almost inevitable that everyone is a non-believer in relation to the teachings of some religious groups, and new alternatives keep appearing on the scene.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Possamai 2005.

<sup>172</sup> Chidester 2005.

<sup>173</sup> Davidsen 2013.

<sup>174</sup> Cusack 2010, 1–2.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 8–19; 141–144.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. 21–25. See also Cusack 2016, 10–23 (Pastafarianism is no longer included as an example here).

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. 9–10; 2016, 22.

<sup>178</sup> For a critical examination of Cusack’s category of invented religions from a discourse theoretical point of view, see Taira 2016b. Taira argues that from a discourse theoretical point of view the category of invented-ness can be useful mainly when examined as a communicative strategy by which a movement

Apart from clearly invented or fiction-based religions, there is also plenty of religious or spiritual activity that does not seem to put much emphasis on ‘real faith’ or the ontological status of their teachings in general. Teemu Taira has described this as a process of ‘liquefaction’ of religion.<sup>179</sup> One concept Taira brings up (applying the work of Lawrence Grossberg) is that of affectivity as a central element in religious or spiritual activities. Taira argues that this side may well be just as or more important for the practitioners as teachings or other cognitive content.<sup>180</sup> Yves Lambert among others has also described possible ways in which religion can interact with modernity, mentioning adaptation and reinterpretation as well as innovation as possible courses of development. Lambert suggests that religious movements that employ such strategies are characterised by features like “worldliness, -- de-hierarchization of the human and the divine, self-spirituality, parascientificity, pluralism, and mobility.”<sup>181</sup> It is possible that the emphasis on coherent ‘beliefs’ is not so heavily emphasised in such a context.

#### *4.1.2 Funny religion vs. religion deals with serious matters*

The second problem with Pastafarianism, the mixture of religion and humour, is linked to the previous problem of real faith and invention – from stating that religion is about real, private, coherent beliefs it is not a long leap to say that this genuine faith must also be ‘serious’. Still, the perspective of religion and humour deserves a short examination, not least because Pastafarian humour is not necessarily just any humour, but is often clearly critical in nature and, as Ethan G. Quillen has demonstrated, its use of humour can be linked to a particular Atheist style of criticism of religion.<sup>182</sup>

Why do religion and humour not mix well in the colloquial use? The answer, again, seems to lie in the historically formed stereotype of religion that emphasises not only beliefs, but important, coherent, serious beliefs. Cusack among others has pointed out

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for one reason or another refuses to employ more traditional types of legitimation (Taira 2016b, 126–132).

<sup>179</sup> Taira 2006. Taira borrows the term ‘liquefaction’ or ‘liquid religion’ from Zygmunt Bauman’s theory of ‘liquid modern’. Taira applies this framework to changes in the contemporary religious landscape.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. 45–47; 2007. See also Cusack 2010, 9–10.

<sup>181</sup> Lambert 1999, 303.

<sup>182</sup> Quillen 2017, 196; 214.

that both “[t]he criterion of sincerity, like faith, is -- not susceptible to tests, and is ultimately predicated on the normativity of Christianity”.<sup>183</sup> Religion is often assumed to deal with ‘the ultimate concern’<sup>184</sup>, one’s place in the world, and the difference of right and wrong. William James, for example, has described religion as always including “a serious state of mind”.<sup>185</sup> Having a laugh at the expense of what is considered core questions of human life may sound off, implying insincerity and mockery. Furthermore, frolicking has often been seen as irresponsible behaviour that easily leads to lapses in proper moral conduct. Humour also tends to play with meanings of words, it illuminates and questions power relations, and the discrepancy between ideals and reality. All this gives it a potentially rebellious character that is typically not well received by powers that be – religious institutions hardly make an exception here. Humour, it turns out, is a potent weapon. The study of religious humour has often been about the oppositional relationship between religion and humour, for instance between the official dogma sanctioned by the elite and the vernacular tradition. However, this relationship has been studied from another perspective as well. The questioning and rebellious function of humour can itself become a central religious tenet, or a tool for achieving enlightenment. An example referred to by Cusack, for instance, is the Rinzai School of Zen and its koans, absurd riddles that aim at freeing the mind from its habitual patterns of thinking and leading to enlightenment.<sup>186</sup> Ambiguous, typically funny trickster stories have also been referred to as a mixture of religion and humour where no problematic contradiction exists.<sup>187</sup> In general, humour and serious message do not need to exclude one another can have several functions and genres of humour can convey very different messages. Bobby Henderson, for example, repeatedly refers to ‘satire’ when discussing Pastafarianism.<sup>188</sup> This choice of word implies that a serious message is in fact involved, seriousness is simply relocated from the explicit, humorous language to the underlying subtext. In his research into other parody religions predating Pastafarianism, Richard Lloyd Smith refers to a “ha ha only serious” mentality which he connects with “hacker culture” in which an ambiguous use of satire and ironic jokes is an important form of communication.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Cusack 2010, 49.

<sup>184</sup> Tillich 1964.

<sup>185</sup> James 1985.

<sup>186</sup> Cusack 2010, 49–50.

<sup>187</sup> See for example Wikström 2004, 277–284.

<sup>188</sup> Henderson, *The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster*, About.

<sup>189</sup> Smith 1996.

Along similar lines, modern parody religions that in one way or another include humour in their dogma have been discussed by scholars who point out the various functions that humour can have in religious language. As discussed in chapter 1, some have pointed out that humour can convey something like ‘spiritual enlightenment’ or something else that the adherents find meaningful. In such treatises, though, it is still typical to assume that some serious underlying content is necessary for a ‘real religion’, as discussed earlier in conjunction with Laurel Narizny’s work on satire and joke religions.<sup>190</sup> Maria Riihimäki has applied the concept of ‘sacred laughter’ to Pastafarianism as well.<sup>191</sup> What can be gathered from these studies is that the mixture of humour and religion does not necessarily need to be all that problematic, and humour can have many roles in the sphere of the religious. There are arguments that can, if not directly place such movements into the category of religion, at least open the possibility of their religiousness.

#### *4.1.3 Political religion vs. religion is a private matter*

Not only is Pastafarianism invented, and not only is it humorous - it can also well be perceived as 'political'. Pastafarianism arguably started as a one-man protest against a decision made by public officials. Pastafarians have run numerous campaigns and taken legal action in order to gain formal recognition by public authorities. Pastafarianism is easy to cast as a political campaign masking itself with a religious façade for a very specific purpose – protesting the role of religion in the society, or claiming rights and benefits typically awarded to movements officially classified as religion. Sure enough, this element is at least a part of Pastafarianism, but the reason behind this being a problem with regards to Pastafarianism-as-a-religion is the idea that real religion deals with real, serious faith, ‘ultimate concerns’ or human’s individual relationship with the transcendent – and that it is a private matter.

To argue that something is not religion because it is in some sense only political is, of course, different from stating that something is not religion because it is *also* political. Still, behind the former argument one can perceive the implication that ‘real religion’ somehow resides outside the public and the political, even if it can in some cases cross

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<sup>190</sup> See chapter 1.3, p. 16–17.

<sup>191</sup> Riihimäki 2016.

that boundary and act in the public sphere. As Martin has demonstrated, “religion is a private matter” is a strong stereotype and political ideal that, again, has a particular history in the political organisation of modern Western societies.<sup>192</sup>

Yet, for a large part, religion does not seem particularly private or unpolitical. This has provoked many attempts at explanation from scholars of religion and various public commentators. One milestone in academic research is José Casanova’s work on the so-called secularisation paradigm. In his monograph *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994), Casanova critically examines the secularisation thesis. In his view, what is often considered a unified theory in fact consists of three separate hypotheses, and not all of these hypotheses are supported by evidence. Casanova suggests the term “deprivatisation” to describe the way religion is relocated from private to public realm. He argues that it is not necessary for religion to be entirely private in the modern society, but that religions that do act publicly can be compatible with the modern principle of separation of public and private spheres – as long as they limit their ‘publicness’ to certain areas of public life, in Casanova’s parlance the civil society.

A multifaceted scholarly debate has risen on this topic of religion in the public and private sphere, leading to questions of what is actually meant by this distinction, how and where does it operate, and also how our understanding of ‘religion’ may be too simplistic. Alongside religion, “secularity” and “secularism(s)” have come under critical examination.<sup>193</sup> Craig Martin has examined the distinction from the perspective of ideology critique and social constructionism, and does not mince his words:

The public/private and religion/state binaries are about as sophisticated as talk about the four humors.<sup>194</sup>

In his monograph *Masking hegemony: a genealogy of liberalism, religion, and the private sphere* (2010) Martin argues that the while the rhetoric of religion being a private matter and inherently non-political is hiding normative claims which ultimately serve to mask a certain arrangement of power relations between state and Christian

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<sup>192</sup> Martin 2010.

<sup>193</sup> See e.g. Asad 2003.

<sup>194</sup> Martin 2010, 157.

institutions.<sup>195</sup> While Martin does not argue that nothing changed with the introduction of the liberal political idea of separation of church and state, he nevertheless argues that this was more a matter of re-arranging “circulation of power” between powers-that-be than any definite break.<sup>196</sup> As Martin writes, “religion/state distinction did not privatize religion – the hegemony of Christian ideology in determining and justifying the shape of the state and its functions was quite constant.”<sup>197</sup> The rhetoric of religion as a private matter and of religious values being excluded from the political process creates an idea of political process and public space in state of some kind of neutrality when, in fact, any value judgements are in fact produced in the private sphere and there is no radical break between the two spheres. The idea of an “ideologically neutral and objective” secular sphere hides a distinction of “good” and “bad” religion – and those in power get to define, what counts as neutral and objective, and thus acceptable, values and reasons.<sup>198</sup> (It is worth noting that Casanova also writes that morality is an intersubjective matter and cannot be reduced to the preferences of the individual alone.<sup>199</sup> In my view, this points towards the idea that religion in some form is always involved in the ‘public’ – only, perhaps more than Casanova perceived.)

Some scholars have noted that this ‘neutrality’ of the secular (public) sphere has become more and more questioned, and one reason among others is the rise of a multicultural society and increasing diversity. This may lead to questioning of state of the affairs previously considered self-evident. One example is to question whether some religious groups have the right to promote their cause in the public space, when others are refused may be refused the same right. The Atheist Bus Campaign that took place in several European countries and in the USA in 2009 is a case in point.<sup>200</sup> Joseph Laycock has examined Pastafarianism from this point of view and has noted that it, among other similar movements, works to make visible the situation where certain religious institutions in fact hold privilege by claiming these same rights and illuminating the fact

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<sup>195</sup> For a brief description of the argument, see Martin 2010, 7–8. Martin’s work considers mainly the situation in the United States, but key points of his analysis could be applied to many European countries as well.

<sup>196</sup> Martin 2010, 33.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid. 35.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Casanova 1994.

<sup>200</sup> An overview on the Atheist Bus Campaign in different countries, see Spencer & Bullivant (eds.) 2017.



that what is framed as neutral in fact carries historical and cultural undertones (and power relations) which determine, what can be accepted as religion and what not.<sup>201</sup>

#### *4.1.4 Religion and atheism – an impossible combination?*

Many Pastafarians also openly identify as Atheists, and many Atheist organisations seem to consider Pastafarians as one of their own.<sup>202</sup> If religion is about sincere belief in god or supernatural entity, or at least to some kind of ‘transcendent’, and atheism about not believing in precisely such things, then the combination of atheism and religion does look paradoxical.

Non-religiosity and atheism as objects of study are of relatively recent vintage. Both terms (and ‘secular’ for that matter) have often been treated simply as the other side of the coin, as something that is left when ‘religion’ is taken out of the picture. However, scholars have pointed out that we are dealing with something more complicated than the terms alone would suggest. A simple definition of either atheism or non-religiosity will not do, just like definitions of religion have been proven problematic. In addition, when one studies non-religiosity or atheism as identity markers, the social significance or public connotations of these terms, it turns out that non-religiosity and atheism are not the same thing.<sup>203</sup> Christopher R. Cotter, Abby Day, and Elisabeth Arweck among others show in their research that people draw on much more nuanced distinctions, and may for example identify as non-religious for various reasons, but not necessarily as Atheists.<sup>204</sup> Egbert Ribberink and Dick Houtman have also studied the distinction between those who simply do not believe and those who take a more active anti-religious stance.<sup>205</sup> This more assertive brand of atheism, frequently referred to as “new atheism”, is not necessarily well received by those who hold in some respects an atheist worldview.<sup>206</sup> Similar tones were observable in my own research into the reactions the Atheist Bus Campaign provoked in the Netherlands.<sup>207</sup> In addition, people may well

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<sup>201</sup> Laycock 2013.

<sup>202</sup> Narizny 2009; Laycock 2013; TKU/O/18/20, 1:8.

<sup>203</sup> See e.g. Cheruvallil-Contractor et al. 2013.

<sup>204</sup> Cotter 2015; Day 2013; Arweck 2013.

<sup>205</sup> Ribberink & Houtman 2010.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> In this study, I applied Cora Schuh, Marian Burchard, and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr’s classification of different types of underlying ethos for secularity (of the public sphere).<sup>207</sup> It turned out that some people

identify in different ways in different contexts, like Christian but not religious.<sup>208</sup> Abby Day has described belief as a “hinge”: “depending on the social context, the belief being expressed may swing towards the normative religious or secular”.<sup>209</sup> So, mixing different identities – even various religious and non-religious identities – is not so unheard of.

To my knowledge, Pastafarianism has not been directly studied from the point of view of atheism as an identity marker. Ethan G. Quillen has studied Pastafarian narrative in conjunction with a more common discursive device he identified as Atheist and calls “argument from fictionalisation”. However, his study only addresses part of Pastafarian imagery, its ‘religious discourse’, to borrow Taira’s terminology. Many Pastafarians seem to claim that they are also Atheists and that this is entirely possible in their religion. Henderson also writes that there are many members who are Atheists, although Pastafarianism isn’t the same as atheism. If atheism is defined as lack of faith in gods or higher beings and the focus is shifted to e.g. community, being part of something bigger, morality, affectivity, or other such things, this may well make space for atheism as well.

## 4.2 Summary

This chapter has provided a very brief and very incomplete examination of broad topics currently discussed in the field of study of religion. My aim has been to address three questions; first, why Pastafarianism often does not fit a general understanding of religion; second, where such idea of religion may have originated; and third, how scholars of religion have approached these issues and, in doing so, perhaps created discursive space for Pastafarians as well.

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who would support secularity in the public sphere, and even hold an atheist worldview, were not particularly attracted by the assertive tone of the campaigners.

<sup>208</sup> Day et al 2013, 2. This volume, edited by Abby Day, Giselle Vincett, and Christopher R. Cotter offers a good spread of theoretical perspectives as well as case studies showing the complexities of studying the social significance of categories such as “religious” and “non-religious”, their negotiable, porous, and contextual nature, and the “middle ground” between what are often perceived as clear either/or-distinctions.

<sup>209</sup> Day 2013, 69.

To summarise, our colloquial understanding of what religion is inherited from a very particular historical background. Elements of this understanding derive from different sources and do not produce an entirely coherent definition of religion. Still, some ideas are very pervasive; such as religion being about seriously held belief in some kind of supernatural entities or explanations of the world, religion being about ‘the transcendent’, or religion being essentially a private matter. Pastafarianism seems to happily transgress all of the boundaries, even though it is also possible that in some cases it is not so much about crossing the line than negotiating a new way to stay within a given definition. Pastafarianism is not the only one causing problems with how religion has previously been perceived, and scholars of religion are examining these category boundaries from a multitude of perspectives. In the following chapter, I will turn to analysing Pastafarian writings in order to see, how they relate to such objections, and also examine whether their arguments are similar to the scholarly work I have introduced.

## 5 ANALYSIS

### 5.1 Overview

So far, I have discussed some common stereotypes about religion, where they come from and how they are being used. I have also introduced some ways scholars have worked on redefining religion, often constructing conceptual space for phenomena that would not necessarily fit the stereotypes. Academics are not the only ones working on these (re)definitions of religion; there are many venues where the content of this term is being produced and negotiated. This negotiation is in many ways at the core of Pastafarianism itself, and this is what I will be focusing on in this section. What kind of discourses on religion (and non-religion) do Pastafarians draw on, how do they describe Pastafarianism and locate it in relation to these discourses? I start with Bobby Henderson's text and the animation by Matt Tillman, after which I analyse the responses I received from European Pastafarians.

### 5.2 About Pastafarianism: the website of The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster

#### 5.2.1 *Introduction*

The "About" page on Henderson's website has as its clear aim to explain Pastafarianism's basic features to those who for whatever reason seek more information about the movement. It is also quick to address doubts about the legitimacy of the Pastafarianism as a religion. The tone of the text is an interesting, subtle combination of quite overtly humorous remarks often recognised as the hallmark of Pastafarianism and arguments without any clear humoristic tone. The opening of the page, for instance, rather smacks of college humour:

With millions, if not thousands, of devout worshipers, the Church of the FSM is widely considered a legitimate religion, even by its opponents – mostly fundamentalist Christians, who have accepted that our God has larger balls than theirs.

This passage is shortly followed with the following, seemingly straight-faced claim:

The Church of FSM is legit, and backed by hard science. Anything that comes across as humour or satire is purely coincidental.

It is possible to read this statement as a serious claim. However, as this argument, especially the latter sentence, is explained and considerably softened in other passages on the same page, it seems safe to assume that this is a way to implicitly communicate the name of the game. This is a good example of the style(s) of humour present on the page. However, it can reasonably clearly be distinguished from the passages where other, more straight-faced types of arguments are employed. Satirical portrayals of religion carry ideas about what religion is about, some passages portray an ambiguous “ha ha only serious”<sup>210</sup> tone, and some arguments are presented in a less tongue-in-cheek tone.

### 5.2.2 Religion and Pastafarianism

Henderson’s core claim is that Pastafarianism is a valid, real religion – on this point he is very clear. To make his case, he appeals to several common ideas about religion. While some of the ways Henderson addresses religion are relatively secular and social scientific in tone, he also often portrays religion as being about transcendent experiences. In addition, even though Henderson casts Pastafarianism as similar to other religions, he also points out crucial differences that, in his view, make Pastafarianism a better religion than the ‘mainstream’ ones. Henderson clearly addresses the questions of ‘real faith’, ‘seriousness’, and Pastafarianism’s relationship with atheism.

Apart from refuting the validity of some ideas of what religion is about, Henderson is also moving between them and relativising the importance of some while emphasising others. I have identified three key discursive strategies Henderson uses in arguing that Pastafarianism is a real religion. I call these *nuancing*, *shifting*, and *strategic equating*. In addition, he employs what I have chosen to call *strategic open-endedness*, which serves to keep his explanation of Pastafarianism open to various interpretations.<sup>211</sup> By *nuancing* I refer to the way Henderson opens and deconstructs the category of religion. This is a strategy that allows for other discursive operations. For instance, Henderson explicates different common views on what religion is about and then shifts emphasis

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<sup>210</sup> Smith 1996 < The Graz University of Technology Hacker Lexicon.

<sup>211</sup> The word ‘strategic’ included in the latter two terms simply means that the occasions where these strategies are used are not random or equal, but they are deployed in very specific context and in relation to very specific terms.

between these to make room for Pastafarianism – hence the second discursive strategy, *shifting*. In the following example one can trace different uses of nuancing and shifting:

We believe religion – say Christianity, Islam, Pastafarianism – does not require literal belief in order to provide spiritual enlightenment. Much of the transcendent experience of religion can be attributed to the community. And while some members of religion are indoctrinated True Believers, many are not. There are many levels of Belief and each is no more or less legitimate than the other.

First, Literal belief is singled out as an optional element of religion, but other components (transcendent experience, perhaps also spiritual enlightenment<sup>212</sup>, and community) are immediately brought up. Henderson shifts the meaning of religion towards these elements and away from literal belief. The requirement of literal belief is further problematised by another form of nuancing, this time of the group labelled “members of religion”: while some are True Believers, many are not. Finally, there are many levels of belief. Problematising the concept of belief in this way is an important feature of Henderson’s rhetoric throughout the text.

*Strategic equating* is a discursive operation to some extent similar to what Joseph Laycock calls the “command to compare”. In his article Laycock argues that this is a central function of parody religions: by constructing a satirical mirror image of established religions they force the spectator to make comparisons and ask questions about what, if anything, makes the established religions different from the satirical alternative.<sup>213</sup> Examined through concrete language use, Henderson definitely invites such comparison. In the following excerpt, for instance, he addresses the question of humour, connecting it with the literal belief requirement. Under the heading “is this a joke?” he 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. A lot of Christians don’t believe the Bible is literally true – but that doesn’t mean they aren’t True Christians.

Again, Henderson uses nuancing, this time on Pastafarianism: *Elements* of Pastafarianism may be satirical, but the phrasing suggests that there are also other

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<sup>212</sup> The use of the word ‘spiritual’ is interesting, because spiritual enlightenment can be read as an element of religion, but it can also be read as being in slight contradiction with ‘religion’; much reminiscent of the religion–spiritual divide present in many contemporary discourses.

<sup>213</sup> Laycock 2013, 20.

elements of another sort. From here, Henderson moves back to the theme of literal belief and compares Pastafarianism with Christianity, in which, he argues, it is entirely possible not to believe literally and still be considered a valid member. Similar comparison is employed more directly in the following:

If you say Pastafarians must believe in a literal Flying Spaghetti Monster to be True Believers, then you can make a similar argument for Christians.

Apart from the real faith problem, Henderson also addresses the humorous nature of Pastafarianism, often in the context of real belief. An interesting argument concerning humour in particular is made under the heading “I don’t think you believe in any of this” in the Q&A part:

Some Pastafarians honestly believe in the FSM and some see it as satire. I would just make the point that satire is an honest, legitimate basis for religion. Satire relies on truth to be effective. If it’s a joke, it’s a joke where to understand the punchline you must be conscious of the underlying truth.

Here, Henderson is again pointing to variety, and seems to refer to his earlier point that all levels of belief are equally valid. He also claims that religion can well be based on satire. Interestingly, his argument for this is that satire relies on *an underlying truth*, which would seem to point towards the need of some kind of deeper meaning as basis for religion – even though the importance of ‘literal belief’ is something Henderson denies. Further, this argument counters the idea that humour excludes ‘real meaning’. Taken together with the heading, it would seem to imply that one can ‘really believe’ in the context of satire. However, it is not explicitly stated that this would necessarily be the case in Pastafarianism.

Henderson also points at ‘cults’ or religious frauds as another way of questioning the validity of literal belief as the measure of real religion:

Compare our religion to those that are built on lies. I am not talking necessarily about mainstream religions (which themselves are often full of mysticism and ad-hoc reasoning), but think of cults, or churches where the leaders are scamming their followers out of money. These are groups where the followers fully believe. Are these churches legitimate since they have many True Believers?

Here, Henderson draws distinctions between different kinds of religion: Pastafarianism, mainstream religions, and cults. Certain open-endedness can be seen in how Henderson

steers a careful course in stating that he doesn't *necessarily* mean mainstream religions are built on lies (although he might). He is careful to note that while these religions are *often* full of seemingly questionable traits, it is possible that this is not always the case. In contrast, 'cults' and 'churches where the leaders are scamming their followers out of money' are framed as something different, and negative in their entirety. At least they do not warrant any nuancing.

Although Henderson equates Pastafarianism with other religions in many ways, he also distinguishes it both from 'cults' and 'mainstream religions'. In the following quote he simultaneously emphasises the idea that religion comprises of elements other than belief and that community is one important part of religion, but also draws this distinction between different sorts of religion:

Or can we agree that religion is as much about community as any shared faith. By any rational metric, Pastafarians are as legitimate a religious group as any. Arguably more so, since we're honest and rational.

Emphasising community at the expense of shared faith is one way to make room for Pastafarianism under the label of religion. The references Henderson makes to rationality are interesting. I take the first one to mean any explicable and measurable definition of religion. What draws my attention most, though, is the last sentence. Pastafarianism is described as more legitimate because it is *honest* and *rational*, which is to imply that others somehow are not, or are less so.<sup>214</sup> This is a reference to the idea that is communicated in many other parts of the text: all religions have contradictory, irrational parts to them, and many adherents to a given religion simply skip those parts, but they do not explicitly say this. The same idea is communicated in another quote that also references rationality:

There is a lot of outlandish stuff in the Bible that rational Christians choose to ignore.

The alleged honesty of Pastafarianism is also emphasised in the following passage, where Henderson also juxtaposes Pastafarianism with 'mainstream religion':

Pastafarian scripture has some outlandish and sometimes contradictory components – and unlike the scripture of mainstream religion, these pieces were intentional and obvious, and our congregation is aware of this.

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<sup>214</sup> Davidsen 2012.



The same implication comes across in the following Q&A pair, where Henderson also considers in full the possible implications of the (implicitly expressed) idea that many, perhaps all religions have been invented:

Q: In 1000 years will FSM be a mainstream religion?

A: This is something I think about a lot. I sometimes wonder what the Church of Scientology – or lets say the Mormon Church looked like 5 years after Joseph Smith transcribed the scriptures out of the hat with the seer stones. What worries me is that right now I can be pretty sure there aren't a lot of dogmatic nutty FSM people around, but what about in 20 years? What about in 50 years? What about when someone figures out a way to make money out of this and turns it into some new age spiritual enlightenment thing.

Here, Henderson is subtly using comparison as a tool to further relativise the distinction between Pastafarianism and 'mainstream religions'. As the reader might remember from the first chapter, this is not the first instance where Church of Scientology has polemically been referred to as a 'parody religion' and used as an ambiguous example of a religion that is clearly taken seriously by its adherents and considered a religion by many, yet a lot of people also perceive it as an invented thing, perhaps even a dangerous scam.<sup>215</sup> Mormonism is also an interesting example. Henderson seems to imply that the foundational story of Mormonism might sound implausible to an outside observer. This passage also shows an interesting idea about how religion – any religion – is ultimately invented, and Pastafarianism logically thus carries the exact same potential to become something more established in the future.

To summarise, what Henderson seems to be saying is that there are different kinds of religion. On one end there are 'cults' and religious frauds, which are straightforwardly negative. Mainstream religions are nuanced and divided to categories in which some are 'true believers' while others are 'rational'. Literal belief and 'dogmatism' seem to be the negatively loaded terms that are detached from religion as a whole, but mainstream religions are not portrayed as negative in their entirety:

Nonbelievers would be better off criticizing only on the negative, damaging parts of religion, and being less judgmental about the idea of religion in general.

Finally, Pastafarianism is described as a valid religion that in some sense is similar to mainstream religions. This is not where the argument ends, however. Pastafarianism is

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<sup>215</sup> See chapter 1.1.2, p. 4–6.

also described as a religion crucially different from – and better than – mainstream religions. The core argument for this seems to be that Pastafarianism can produce ‘transcendent experiences’ and provide a community while not clashing with the authority of science. It is worth noting that this is not a new idea. Many new religions, strands of neo-paganism, and forms of contemporary spirituality seem to shift their emphasis to other things than belief.<sup>216</sup> In the words of Carole Cusack, “members are more likely to ask ‘does it work?’ than ‘is it true?’”<sup>217</sup>

On the whole, Henderson treats religion in very social scientific terms. He emphasises community as a key feature of religion and points at differences in how religious people interpret their respective traditions. Here, Henderson states that what largely accounts for some religions to be more widely accepted is their age and number of adherents. This is a fairly clear dismissal of religious faith, but other sides of religion are brought up as good and valuable:

The fact that millions of people get something positive out of a religion – even if it is based in superstition – *\*does\** mean something. But that’s not to say it’s True, only that it has Value. For many people, religion is about being part of a community and being part of something bigger and more important than themselves. These transcendent experiences are something we want to emulate.

Henderson implies a distinction between what he often refers to as ‘mainstream religions’ and some other sort of religion, under which Pastafarianism also fits. Even though this other, more general idea of religion is mainly only implied in expressions like “by any rational metric” or “transcendent experiences” or “spiritual enlightenment”, these can be taken to refer to two different ideas about religion. The former could refer to something like what Laycock speaks of as a second-order category of religion.<sup>218</sup> The latter idea about religion concerning the ‘transcendent’ is interesting in its vagueness. As Leslie Dorrough Smith has noted, this idea about religion concerning the transcendent has been used by scholars of religion among many others.<sup>219</sup> In the context of Pastafarianism it is particularly interesting as it is left open for different interpretations. First, if transcendent experiences are named as the common core of religions, it is possible to look past questions of dogma and beliefs, and still consider

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<sup>216</sup> Taira 2006; Lambert 1999.

<sup>217</sup> Cusack 2010, 9–10.

<sup>218</sup> Laycock 2013, 20; 25.

<sup>219</sup> Smith 2017.

Pastafarianism a religion. Second, the nature and source of such experiences is left entirely open. Thus, Pastafarianism can be discursively construed as a valid religion in two ways: First, it can be a valid religion in a formal sense because it fulfils some tick-box list criteria for religion. Second, it can be a valid religion because it can produce transcendent experiences, which are presented as the universal core of religions, but not defined further in any way.

### 5.2.3 *The others of religion*

Examples of what kind of ideas about religion are brought up in Henderson's text have come up in the previous examination. What is Pastafarianism (and religion) not about? To begin with, Henderson is very vocal in distinguishing Pastafarianism from atheism, and especially from anti-religiosity:

Q: [a] lot of Pastafarians seem to be anti-religion and/or Atheists (why is this?)

A: We're not anti-religion. This is NOT an Atheists club. Anyone and everyone is welcome to join our church including current members of other religions. In addition to the Atheists, Agnostics, and Freethinkers who have joined us, we have a number of Christian (and Muslim, and Hindu and Buddhist ...) members and I would love to have more. Note to the religious: you are welcome here.

And:

Q: Are you an Atheist / heathen / what?

A: I don't have a problem with religion. What I have a problem with is religion posing as science.

Once more with feeling:

Let me make this clear: we are not anti-religion, we are anti - crazy nonsense done in the name of religion. There is a difference.

Given that, in the US context, atheism is a term rather negatively loaded, this emphasis seems understandable.<sup>220</sup> While not equating atheism with anti-religiousness, Henderson clearly considers this connotation to be so strong that it requires explanation. He is also paying attention to the fact that there are many kinds of identities that could perhaps be labelled non-religious, mentioning Agnostics and Freethinkers alongside Atheists. Clearly, being an Atheist and a Pastafarian simultaneously is not a problem as

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<sup>220</sup> Edgell et al. 2006.

such. Still, the question why so many Pastafarians seem to be anti-religion or Atheists is not really answered. It is simply refuted. The final quote includes another instance of nuancing: it is implied that religion isn't necessarily bad, but that there is "crazy nonsense is done in the name of religion", which is bad. This is in line with the way Henderson treats religion in general in his writing. The formulation "in the name of religion" is also interesting in that it disconnects the 'real' and 'proper' uses of religion from 'crazy nonsense' that someone (wrongly) does in the name of religion, possibly implying that the latter isn't really religious. This is reminiscent of the discourse on "using religion" that Craig Martin has pointed out.<sup>221</sup>

Another 'other' to religion is, clearly, science. Given the specific context in which Pastafarianism sprung up, it is no wonder that this issue is considered here. Henderson describes religion and science as mutually exclusive categories. Two quotations already addressed from another point of view also illustrate this point very clearly:

What I have a problem with is religion posing as science. Teach Creationism in school, fine, but don't teach it in a science classroom. And don't change the definition of science so that you can teach these things. That's retarded. Supernatural explanations are by definition not science, so why would you teach them in a science classroom?<sup>222</sup>

So, religion with its 'supernatural' explanations are "by definition" not compatible with science. The same point is made in the following:

We should be pushing the idea that faith is not equivalent to evidence-based reasoning without insisting that it's inferior, only that they are different ways of seeing the world. And that problems happen when these world views clash.

Science is thus defined succinctly as "evidence-based reasoning" which is incompatible with "faith". Coming back to the following quotation:

By any rational metric, Pastafarians are as legitimate a religious group as any. *Arguably more so, since we're honest and rational.*

Apart from the legitimation of Pastafarianism by referring to its honesty, rationality is another feature pointed out. This could point towards the idea that Pastafarianism is compatible with science because it doesn't require literal belief in things that are at odds with a scientific view on the world.

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<sup>221</sup> Martin 2010, 1–9.

<sup>222</sup> Henderson 2008a.

To summarise, science and religion are clearly distinguished from one another. However, religion is given its own location which can well coexist with science, as long as religion sticks to a certain place assigned to it and does not attempt to operate on the same field as science. As seen previously, Henderson explicitly seems to have a problem with ‘religion’ being admitted under the label of ‘science’.

#### 5.2.4 *Spaghetti, Wenchies and Metaphysics: Your guide to FSM*

Another central component to the “About” section is an introductory animation, credits of which go to one Matt Tillman. The video is a succinct introduction to the FSM and Pastafarianism. From the point of view of this analysis, the most interesting part is the beginning, where a context is provided. The spectator sees and hears a short depiction of the hectic life of a modern, urban (male) person, wrought with juggling the demands of work, family, and social life. At the same time, the narrator proclaims, there are

[B]ig questions that keep you up at night”. Questions like “why am I here”, “am I a good person” “what happens when I die” and “what is the meaning of it all anyway?”

The video goes on to point out that while science is “tirelessly working on the answers” the answers they produce are not often very easy to grasp. Stylised natural scientists working in a laboratory setting appear, with mathematical formulas written on a blackboard and a sign “science in progress” in the foreground. Religions, on the other hand, are said to “boldly claim that they already know the answers”. Here, the animation shows two male figures standing on a cloud, most likely referring to Christian god and Jesus Christ. The two are soon accompanied with a plethora of religious figures, Lovecraft’s Cthulhu prominently among them. The image is accompanied with the question “[B]ut with so many to choose from, how we know which, if any, hold the truth?”

The dilemma is framed thus: we, modern urban (male) people in our modern lives are troubled with *existential concerns*, as possibly already alluded to with the word ‘metaphysics’ in the video title. It is suggested that people turn to science and religion to find answers to “big questions”. Science is described as being “impenetrable” and it

is implied that the answers science can give are not entirely satisfactory with regards to these big questions. Still, the possibility that science could answer them is not refuted. Religion is presented as claiming to have the answers. It could be argued that this choice of word subtly questions the plausibility of said answers. The problem explicitly associated with religion, however, is that “with so many to choose from” it is impossible to evaluate which one gets it right.

After framing the problem and juxtaposing science and religion(s) in this way, a solution is offered; “a combination of natural wonders of science and supernatural claims of religion”. Pastafarianism is described the world’s “first and only empirical religious movement”. No further explanation as to how this empirical religious movement solves the issue of combining science and religion is given. It is possible that this is a satirical reference to Intelligent Design, but it is not elaborated on. Instead, a brief description of the core teachings of Pastafarianism follows. The Flying Spaghetti Monster and his feats are briefly described, as is Pastafarian heaven. Pirates are introduced as the chosen people of the FSM. After this, a “god back guarantee” is offered. This is to say that one can try Pastafarianism for 30 days and, if the results are not satisfying, “your old god will most likely take you back”.

#### *5.2.5 Summary*

In conclusion, Henderson is doing two types of work. He deconstructs the category of religion in a certain way to question the importance of literal belief in religion, shifting the content of the term towards other features, such as community and “being part of something bigger than oneself”. Still, most of his discursive work is not so much about deconstructing what we mean by the term ‘religion’ but about making space for Pastafarianism by choosing certain stereotypes to appeal to. For instance, while Henderson is questioning the importance of literal faith, he is not entirely refuting the centrality of faith in religion. Instead, he is referring to “many levels of belief”. He is also subtly invoking the idea that organised religion is something distinct from the ‘essence’ of religion.<sup>223</sup> It is noteworthy that Henderson explicitly uses the term “transcendent experiences” to refer to something he, so it seems, considers to be behind

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<sup>223</sup> On Neo-American Church, see Laycock 2013, 21–24.

‘religion’ as a historical tradition set up around this experience. There is a similarity between Henderson’s argumentation and what Joseph Laycock has pointed out in his article, more specifically on the distinction between ‘church’ and ‘religion’. Laycock suggests that what is implied is a very protestant understanding of what is the ‘essence’ of religion – that is, a personal, direct encounter with the divine – and how this essence can be distinguished from ‘church(es)’.<sup>224</sup>

The way Henderson uses the argument that religion is not bad but can be put to bad uses can be seen as an invitation to those who consider themselves religious or at least find the more aggressive modes of atheism unattractive. Pretty much anyone can agree to the argument that “we’re against the crazy nonsense done in the name of religion” – as long as defining crazy nonsense is left open for everyone to interpret. “Cults and religious frauds” as negative categories can further provide a common enemy. Finally, although Henderson is mostly refuting connections with atheism (which he mostly associates with anti-religiosity) and he is sticking to a very liberal discourse on religion, he is also making some concessions to those more critically inclined.

As Quillen has demonstrated, the discursive device of argument from fictionalisation and its connection with atheism is clearly recognisable. Certain types of criticism of religion are widely spread among Western youth.<sup>225</sup> Alone, such parody certainly conveys an understanding of religion that is typically focused on the problems in religious truth-claims. The second discursive layer distances Pastafarianism from the first, satirical layer. This is where Pastafarianism becomes more complex than a type of criticism. In a relatively straight-faced tone, Henderson dishes out arguments that serve to open the category of religion for re-evaluation. While still framing traditional religions as more or less based on false/unverifiable truth claims, Henderson presents the core function of religion in general as finding answers to existential concerns, “spiritual enlightenment” and “transcendent experience”. This approach can be seen as a relatively modern, secular, even social scientific take on religion. However, the appeal to terms like ‘spiritual’ or ‘transcendent’ seems to connect Henderson’s arguments to the fluid field of spirituality and new religious movements, among which a much more

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<sup>224</sup> Laycock 2013, 22.

<sup>225</sup> Day et al 2013, 2–3.

relativised approach to truth claims reigns, and what ‘feels right’ is considered the highest authority.

The punchline in Henderson’s text is clear: Pastafarianism is a real religion. Only, it is a different kind of a religion. Henderson sees Pastafarianism as a movement distinct from anti-religiosity and secular movements that criticise religion in general, although they might share goals with Pastafarianism. As Laycock has remarked, Henderson’s Pastafarianism is interested in maintaining a boundary especially between religion and science.

### 5.3 Interview responses

#### 5.3.1 *Introduction*

Moving from Henderson and Tillman to the writings of European Pastafarians, the context changes somewhat. In general, arguments like Henderson’s did come up, although there is also divergence from his views. Variation emerges especially with regards to questions of atheism and its relation to Pastafarianism.<sup>226</sup> This variation isn’t lost on my respondents either. Some mentioned divisions among Pastafarianism especially regarding the attitude towards atheism and anti-religiosity.<sup>227</sup>

For my analysis, the third section of the interview proved to be the most fruitful, because it focused on reflections on Pastafarianism. I asked the respondents for their views on why Pastafarianism is so popular, what its relationship with atheism is, and whether there are differences between various Pastafarian communities in different countries. Although the question about Pastafarianism and atheism may in some ways be a problematic one, as I am the one introducing the term into the discussion, it yielded interesting reflections on what Pastafarianism is about and what its relationship with atheism, but also with religion, is like. In the following I examine the way Pastafarians from across Europe describe Pastafarianism, what kind of ideas of religion and atheism come up in their writing, and how they locate Pastafarianism in relation to them.

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<sup>226</sup> See also Laycock 2013, 24–25.

<sup>227</sup> TKU/O/18/15, 1:9.



### 5.3.2 Religion and Pastafarianism

My questions did not directly invite reflections on religion in general. I asked for reflections on Pastafarianism, mostly referring to it by name or the label ‘movement’ – although I did, in the second section of the question list, refer to “other religious groups” two times. This was a bad choice on my part, as it may steer towards the interpretation that I already place Pastafarianism in the category of religions. How this might affect the respondents’ writing is impossible to say, but it is a limitation to be considered. What does seem clear is that at least some of the respondents did not seem to feel the need to explicitly defend the idea that Pastafarianism is indeed a religion.

Some general ideas about religion did come up indirectly, typically in the ways respondents described Pastafarianism. Clearly the most pervasive idea about religion was that it is about beliefs. This was taken for granted in most responses, even though a couple of respondents referred to other elements of religion as being more important than literal belief, in the same vein Henderson did. When respondents were equating Pastafarianism with (other) religions, following the ‘command to compare’ rhetoric, this was also usually focused on belief:

[A]ny logical and rational person can see FSM is as real and plausible as any of the other 4000 deities.<sup>228</sup>

You can say yes, Atheists are probably the vast majority of pastafarians. But this is not the right question to ask in the case of Pastafarianism. Atheists say god (any) does not exist. Agnostics say they don’t know. Pastafarians say “why not”. - - There are religions that claim that the son of God was born from a virgin. - - Pastafarianism says God is made of spaghetti and meatballs. Why not? All these claims have a degree of absurdity and cannot be proved or disproved. Pastafarianism is just another one.<sup>229</sup>

When the respondents described Pastafarianism, many located Pastafarianism in the category of religion, although this was often followed with some specification. One important distinction also present in Henderson’s text was that between something like

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<sup>228</sup> TKU/O/18/11, 2:1.

<sup>229</sup> TKU/O/18/10, 2:3.

institutionalised religion, often named “mainstream religions”, or just “other religions” and Pastafarianism. The former two were usually perceived in negative terms, although these negative traits were mainly implied in the way Pastafarianism is described in relation to them – as a ‘better religion’. Pastafarianism is described as relaxed, joyful and free with a very strong liberal undertone. One respondent described it as a “designer religion”.<sup>230</sup> “Other religions” are often implicitly or explicitly cast as authoritarian, dogmatic, restrictive, and a grey-faced affair altogether. Concepts like fear, judgement, and punishment figured prominently:

It’s free. It doesn’t force you to believe. It’s nice, relaxed, makes you feels good. It doesn’t change your life in any way you don’t want.<sup>231</sup>

I think Pastafarianism is so popular as it doesn’t judge people and help them to be what they want to be with not having to take part in strange rituals and procedures which you don’t want to be a part of. Pastafarians don’t tell people what to do, as we believe that everyone has some kind of ethical compass in ourselves. Add to this that our Deity the FSM doesn’t demand worship, sacrifices or money, He just wants you to be happy and let others be happy in their own way without forcing your belief on them.<sup>232</sup>

Do we really need a religion whose premises are freedom, tolerance and egalitarianism? Yes, especially in Italy. We live in suspicious, repressed societies. We live in the fear of sin.<sup>233</sup>

The Monster doesn’t want us to be afraid of Him. He doesn’t smite people. - - He’s happy if you’re a good person even if you’re Catholic, Atheist or Muslim. This stands opposite to almost all other religions...<sup>234</sup>

I think that the CFSM is so popular because it responds to the need of many people, who are tired of eternal religious disputes and look with favor to a church which is based on tolerance instead of discriminating all other believers.<sup>235</sup>

Some respondents were explicitly referring to religion in negative terms. The majority, however, emphasised that they had no problems with what other people believed in, as long as these beliefs were not forced upon others or given a privileged position in the

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<sup>230</sup> TKU/O/18/3.

<sup>231</sup> TKU/O/18/18, 2:1.

<sup>232</sup> TKU/O/18/17, 2:1.

<sup>233</sup> TKU/O/18/13, 2:1.

<sup>234</sup> TKU/O/18/17, 2:3.

<sup>235</sup> TKU/O/18/8, 2:1.

public sphere, very much echoing the idea Bobby Henderson expresses, although the emphasis is less on science and science education and more on the state apparatus and public institutions in a more general sense:

Nice saying: Science flies you to the moon. Religion flies you into buildings.<sup>236</sup>

Atheists often mock religious people for the nonsense within their beliefs, while Pastafarians should not criticize anyone's religion, despite all that nonsense. Our religion is itself full of nonsense, how could we ever point out our finger to people following their own cults? We take action only when some religious group tries to interfere with others' life. We tolerate everything, except intolerance and discrimination.<sup>237</sup>

Other recurrent references were to distinguish Pastafarianism from 'other religions' which were described implicitly or explicitly in negative terms. Appeal to the command to compare rhetoric was also present in some responses. Only one respondent took a different path and suggested similarity between Pastafarianism and other religions based on common moral ground:

Pastafarian morals is about good sense, tolerance and peace. Most nowadays religions are based on the very same things.<sup>238</sup>

Analysing the responses has at times been complicated because it is not necessarily possible to distinguish different themes neatly. For example, consider the following:

Pastafarianism and atheism are similar in some way, because believing in a God who isn't really interested in punishing humans for their sins (and there really is no sin in our belief) is almost like believing in no god at all: in both cases mankind is in charge for itself, it's up to each of us to tell the right from wrong and seek happiness together.<sup>239</sup>

This quotation is from a lengthy response in which the Italian respondent is explaining their views on the relationship between Pastafarianism and atheism. The whole response renders Pastafarianism and atheism as different things that have some elements in common but are also different from one another in some important ways. Atheism is here framed as not believing in a god. Religion, it is implied, is about believing in a god

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<sup>236</sup> TKU/O/18/1, 2:1.

<sup>237</sup> TKU/O/18/6, 2:3.

<sup>238</sup> TKU/O/18/7, 2:3.

<sup>239</sup> TKU/O/18/6, 2:3.

that punishes people for their wrongdoings. The next passage makes this rather Christian emphasis even more clear, as well as describing religion as being about unverifiable belief:

Furthermore, stating that there is no god has the same scientific value as stating that god is a man with a long white beard who doesn't want you to masturbate, or that god is a Flying Spaghetti Monster. Atheism is a sort of religion, in its own way.<sup>240</sup>

Finally, nuancing between religious people and religious institutions was observable in some cases. Usually religious individuals were portrayed neutrally or in a tolerant tone, while religious organisations were perceived in a negative light:

[M]ost of the Polish 'lukewarm' Catholics are progressive people and they're against the formal and many times a fundamentalist lecture of the Polish Catholic Episcopate.<sup>241</sup>

In the responses, there is often a strong emphasis on political matters. Many respondents describe the situation in their countries as unequal as some religious groups have more power and status than others, and they are described as having a strong influence in the society in general. This is seen as inappropriate and unfair, and something that needs to be challenged. Many Pastafarians also wrote that they have no problem with religion, they simply have a problem with someone else imposing their values on the society at large. Concepts of secularism or secularity were mentioned in this context several times. Using this term usually referred to political principle.

We're not only fighting for our Constitutional right to believe in what we think is true (The Flying Spaghetti Monster), but we also want to show on our example the amount of opportunities other churches have to influence and get subsidised from the taxpayers pocket. We want equality for all, believers (in anything) or not and unfortunately, although the Polish constitution guarantees such, the reality is quite different.<sup>242</sup>

Similar emphasis was especially clear in responses from Italy, Poland, and Spain, but it came up in most responses.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> TKU/O/18/6, 2:3.

<sup>241</sup> TKU/O/18/17, 1:6.

<sup>242</sup> TKU/O/18/17, 1:5.

<sup>243</sup> For examples: TKU/O/18/11, TKU/O/18/15, 1:5; TKU/O/18/18, 1:5.

### 5.3.3 *Atheism and Pastafarianism*

Atheism is a term I myself introduced into the exchange with my respondents by directly asking about how the respondents see its relationship with Pastafarianism. I even made the question slightly provocative by suggesting that Pastafarianism is “often seen as a variant of Atheism” and concluding my question by “[A]re they really one and the same?” It makes sense to assume that this may result in fierce denials. Most Pastafarians indeed refuted the suggestion that Pastafarianism and Atheism are the same thing, but their descriptions of the relationship between the two did vary.

To begin with, atheism was mostly interpreted as meaning lack of belief in a god or deities, not necessarily as anti-religiosity. Henderson made the same distinction in his writing, but focused much more on anti-religiosity and on distinguishing Pastafarianism from it. This may be the effect of different contexts and the audiences the writers anticipate. Some respondents brought this aspect of potential anti-religiosity up as well, but it was often moderated with writing things like “some Atheists mock religion” or distinguished conceptually from atheism:

There is two (or three, depends on how you see it) topics that divide the Pastafarian community. I see it not just in the Dutch group, but also in other groups: 1. is it a joke? 2a. Are we Atheists? 2b. Are we anti-religion?<sup>244</sup>

Many respondents wrote that they themselves personally were Atheists, or that in their view the majority of Pastafarians are Atheists. However, they were typically quick to emphasise that this is by no means necessary for Pastafarians. Some respondents gave examples of family members or friends who were both Pastafarians and Anglicans or Roman Catholics, for instance.<sup>245</sup> This way of emphasising that some Pastafarians are Atheists while others are not is very similar to the nuancing that Henderson uses on concepts of religion and belief.

Two Italian respondents offered interesting terminology to clear up the relationship between Pastafarianism and Atheism. Pastafarianism was described as being “inclusive

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<sup>244</sup> TKU/O/18/15, 1:9.

<sup>245</sup> TKU/O/18/18, 1:8; TKU/O/18/7, 2:3.

monotheism”<sup>246</sup>, “poly-monotheism”<sup>247</sup>, “multi-monotheistic”<sup>248</sup>, and one respondent remarked that many Pastafarians are “half-Atheists”<sup>249</sup>. These terms were not elaborated on in much detail, but they are an interesting example of how the apparent mutual exclusivity between the categories of “religion” and “atheism” was broken down. These terms were pointing at the idea that one can subscribe to different religious views simultaneously, or be Atheist and Pastafarian at the same time. The idea that Pastafarianism can be combined with all kinds of religious beliefs and non-religious views was very recurring.

Two of the respondents expressed the idea that atheism, too, is kind of a religion or ‘dogma’. They both based their argument on the idea that Atheists, too, believe in something that is not scientifically verifiable.

Yes, and this pisses me off. I used to call myself an Atheist but not anymore. I got a lot of problem with a lot of Atheist like for instance Richard Dawkins who is very dogmatic. Because I agree with the Greek philosopher Socrates “The more you learn, the more you realize how little you know...”<sup>250</sup>

Absolutely they are not the same thing. Pastafarianism is a religion and we believe in the FSM. It’s not important that we don’t care much about him. Every Atheist has different ideas on every single thing while pastafarians have some basic rules common to all that make us more strong.<sup>251</sup>

Roughly put, three or four styles of locating Pastafarianism in relation to religion and atheism could be detected in the responses, and these could be seen as forming some kind of a continuum. The first one is to equate Pastafarianism with religion; Pastafarianism is religion, end of story. This could include an explicit rejection of atheism in conjunction with Pastafarianism. This style was only invoked in two responses. Much more typical was to further specify the idea that Pastafarianism is a religion by explaining how Pastafarianism is a religion different from other, more mainstream religions. Pastafarianism was thus distinguished from the (often negative)

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<sup>246</sup> TKU/O/18/12, 2:3.

<sup>247</sup> TKU/O/18/13, 2:3.

<sup>248</sup> TKU/O/18/6, 2:3.

<sup>249</sup> TKU/O/18/6, 2:3.

<sup>250</sup> TKU/O/18/2, 2:3.

<sup>251</sup> TKU/O/18/9, 2:3.

stereotype of religions, but also from atheism. The most common way to locate Pastafarianism in relation to atheism was to say that they were in some ways compatible but still distinct from one another. A few respondents dissociated Pastafarianism from religion and atheism alike, and chose to describe it in other terms. It is also important to note that most of the respondents were very careful to distinguish between Pastafarianism as a whole and individual adherents who, in their view, could hold many personal views on religion and atheism, and this was described as not being a problem.

An interesting exception to the general tone of more or less clearly placing Pastafarianism in the category of religion – whatever the arguments supporting this – was the response from Germany, in which Pastafarianism is clearly separated from religion. Rüdiger, the leading figure of the national Pastafarian community, consistently describes Pastafarianism as a world view (*Weltanschauung*). In addition, his view on the relationship between Pastafarianism and Atheism explicitly differs from the main tone:

As Pastafarians we are obligated to doubt everything, including the existence of our beloved monster. But if such a clearly described and scientifically evident God does not exist, then all the others certainly do not. Therefore, every Pastafarian is automatically also an Atheist.<sup>252</sup>

Yet another interesting exception to the more general tone is the respondent who, at least rhetorically, likens governments and monetary system to religions. This view is reminiscent of a more generally anarchist tone some earlier parody religions, such as Discordianism and Neo-American Church, have demonstrated<sup>253</sup>:

The way I look at it is... why do I care if another religion recognises us? Because I think that most people are polytheistic without even knowing it... like believing in governments or the monetary system.<sup>254</sup>

Finally, a few notes on how Pastafarianism was described outside the category of religion (or atheism). In some responses, Pastafarianism's status was left relatively vague, distinguished from religion and non-religion alike. Some respondents also

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<sup>252</sup> TKU/O/18/4, 2:3. Translated from German by author.

<sup>253</sup> Cusack 2010; Laycock 2013.

<sup>254</sup> TKU/O/18/2, 1:1.

described it as a “community of like-minded people”<sup>255</sup> or “association of people”<sup>256</sup>, or the like. One respondent also described Pastafarianism as “more social and political than religious”<sup>257</sup>.

#### 5.3.4 *Summary*

The responses I have received from European Pastafarians show clear similarities, but also interesting differences in the way they discuss Pastafarianism and what kind of descriptions of religions they employ. In general, their portrayals of religion were not as multi-layered as Henderson’s. This is probably in part also due to different context and the fact that I did not directly ask for reflections on e.g. what, if anything, makes Pastafarianism a religion. Still, similar ideas about religion were detectable in many responses. Religion was typically considered to be about beliefs, even though other possible elements of religion were also brought up. Organised religion was generally sneered upon, even though individual believers were typically treated with a degree of neutrality and rhetoric of goodwill. Pastafarianism was typically distinguished from this type of religion as a better alternative. Pastafarianism was also described as a religion based on its formal features. Direct references to transcendent experience or spirituality were few. Instead, many mentioned things like community, good feelings, morality, and keeping an open mind (or “putting a question mark at the end of every sentence”<sup>258</sup> as one respondent put it.) as important elements in Pastafarianism. Strongest criticism was directed at religious institutions and their influence in political arena, not as much at religions or religious people – even though clearly critical views on religion were also detectable in some responses. Both Laycock’s “command to compare” was used a lot, as was the argument of religion as a private matter that Martin has described.<sup>259</sup> The latter avoids direct confrontation with religious ideas per se, but rather appeals to the argument that no one should be allowed to impose their views on others.

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<sup>255</sup> TKU/O/18/16, 2:1.

<sup>256</sup> TKU/O/18/8, 2:3.

<sup>257</sup> TKU/O/18/11, 2:4.

<sup>258</sup> TKU/O/18/3, 2:4.

<sup>259</sup> Martin describes the logic of this argument in his work and calls it ‘liberal enthymeme’. Martin 2010, 130–156.



## 6 CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Religion old and new

#### 6.1.1 Overview

The focus of this study has been to explore how Bobby Henderson one hand and European Pastafarians on the other construct religion, how they locate Pastafarianism in relation to categories of religion and atheism. I have examined Henderson's written account and a short introductory animation, both published on his website dedicated to the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster. I have also studied the written interview responses from 17 Pastafarians across Europe. I analysed my materials based on a discourse theoretical approach, using discourse analysis as my method.

Pastafarianism is a curious thing. What once was described by one researcher as "interesting but likely short-lived"<sup>260</sup> has proven quite resilient in its popularity. During this research process, Pastafarianism has also shown itself to be a fast-evolving, multi-faceted phenomenon, a hybrid<sup>261</sup> that eludes and often explicitly defies simple categorisation. Still, it isn't a stand-alone phenomenon, and it draws on and illuminates many developments in the discursive field of religion. It has become evident that certain ideas about and discourses on religion were more prevalent than others, even taken for granted. Some of these ideas became visible as the writers set out to challenge them, others simply went without further comment. However, there was also considerable variability especially in how Pastafarianism was described vis-à-vis religion and atheism.

#### 6.1.2 Organised religion

The usages of the term 'religion' that could be construed from both Henderson's text and the responses could roughly be divided into four types. The first, perhaps most clearly observable type was what I have chosen to call *organised religion*. This term was used in some responses, other terms referring to similar content of the term were words like 'mainstream religion', or simply 'other religions'. This usage of the term was

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<sup>260</sup> Wulff 2008, 330.

<sup>261</sup> For the concept of hybrid, see Latour 1993.

typically not elaborated on in any way and it was simply assumed that the reader understands the content of the term without further explanation.

A central feature of this idea of religion was the emphasis on belief. It was often at least implied that religious beliefs in this sense were somehow irrational, ridiculous, or at least unprovable. Henderson himself directly referred to them as being false and “based on superstition”.<sup>262</sup> Many respondents expressed negative views on organised religion. In this, they are by no means alone. In fact, this corresponds quite well with the kind of understanding of religion that has become prevalent in popular culture, according to Day, Vincett and Cotter.<sup>263</sup> Religion in this sense is best seen as an institutional structure. It is based on metaphysical truth claims that cannot be questioned or refuted. It is something ancient, authoritative, restrictive and repressive – and meddling with public life and policy making, which is what Pastafarians are opposed to. Linda Woodhead, for instance, has described religion in this sense succinctly as a “toxic brand”.<sup>264</sup> In addition to clear references to Intelligent Design, this image of religion is what the satirical element in Pastafarianism overtly attacks with satirical mimicking.

### 6.1.3 *Universal religion*

Another usage of the term religion is what I call *universal religion* for brevity. This usage implies that there is some common denominator at the centre of all religions, old and new. The nature of this common denominator can be interpreted in different ways. Henderson especially employs this idea of religion in his writings. He distinguishes organised religion from ‘transcendent experience’ which lies at the core of any religion. This view was not discussed in much detail in the interview responses, but some references to it were observable. The way Henderson distinguishes between ‘mainstream religions’ and ‘transcendent experience’ is reminiscent of the distinction between ‘church’ and ‘religion’ that Joseph Laycock describes in his article on Neo-American Church and Pastafarianism, church referring to an organised institution of

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<sup>262</sup> Henderson, the website of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, About.

<sup>263</sup> “From the chapters in this book, it is clear that the critiques levelled at traditional religions by those involved in alternative spiritualities and secularists alike – that they are too bound by institution, overly hierarchical, sexist, homophobic, highly proscriptive – have permeated the popular culture to such an extent that it is difficult in some cases to use the word ‘religion’ at all.” Day et al. 2013, 2.

<sup>264</sup> Woodhead 2016.

religion, the latter to some kind of individual, direct experience of the divine.<sup>265</sup> Craig Martin has also examined the historical roots of this particular distinction and how it is embedded in the idea of religion being a private matter.<sup>266</sup>

What is interesting about this view is that it can be left conveniently open for different interpretations. The term ‘transcendent experience’ is vague and open-ended as the exact source of such experiences does not seem to require further explanation. Even though Henderson refers to “much of” this transcendent experience as deriving from the community, he does leave this slightly open. Explicit references to transcendent experiences did not come up much in the second part of the analysis, although a couple of respondents referred to something similar. Some explicitly used a more clearly reductionist explanation, like “some rest in human nature”<sup>267</sup> that make people look for “something beyond science”.<sup>268</sup>

#### *6.1.4 Formal religion*

This usage of ‘religion’ was often only implied in both Henderson’s writing and the interview responses. However, even though mainly just implied, it was very important in advancing the argument that Pastafarianism is a valid religion. Perhaps the clearest reference to this was Henderson’s expression “by any rational metric”. This usage of the term refers to religion as a descriptive category. Most of the European Pastafarians did not explicitly draw a distinction between organised religion and religion in the formal sense, but the distinction was often visible in how Pastafarianism was described as valid religion (often through comparing with mainstream religions) but still crucially different from the mainstream ones. Without any second order criteria, such different-but-same - approach would hardly be possible. One respondent explicitly criticised the fact that the state can decide whose religion is real and worthy of privileges, while others are not.

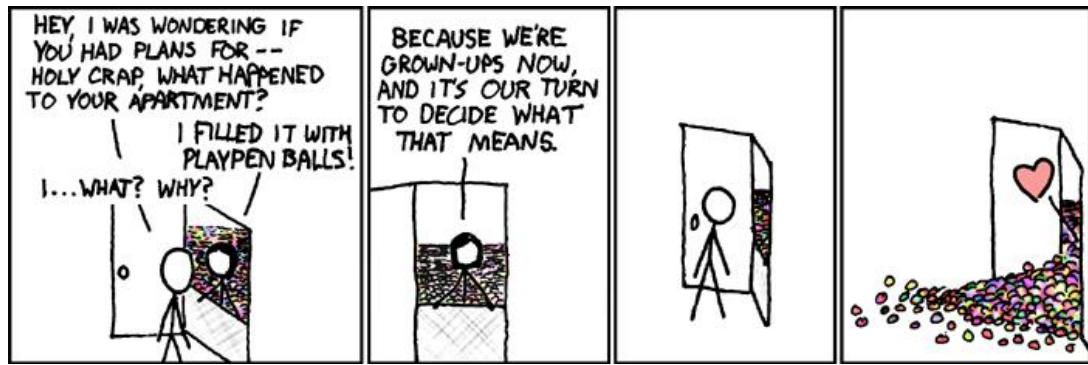
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<sup>265</sup> Laycock 2013, 22.

<sup>266</sup> Martin 2010.

<sup>267</sup> TKU/O/18/1, 2:1.

<sup>268</sup> TKU/O/18/1, 2:1.



Picture 1 "Grownups" by xkcd. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 2.5 License.

The above comic strip succinctly describes something of the attitude I have come across while reading Pastafarian writings. The very idea that it is possible to give terms a new meaning, and questioning those conventions and institutions that hold the power to define what terms (like 'grown-up' or 'religion') mean is present in Pastafarian thought, although not always formulated very clearly, and clearly the idea of religion as organised religion lives side by side with this idea of religion as an empty category.

### 6.1.5 Pastafarianism

How does Pastafarianism relate to these different 'religions' present in Pastafarian writings? As for *organised religion*, Pastafarianism often seems to be placed in a different-but-the-same position. On one hand, Pastafarianism is compared with 'traditional' or 'mainstream' religions and similarities are pointed out. On the other, Pastafarianism is described both by Henderson and by many European Pastafarians as crucially different – and better – than its traditional cousins.

*Formal religion* view also makes space for Pastafarianism in the category of religion, although the underlying logic is different. If religion is taken to refer to a generic formal definition, it should be reasonably easy to argue that Pastafarianism meets the criteria – especially as 'belief' does not lend itself well for measuring. Shifting the definition towards things like 'community', 'symbols' or 'ritual' further makes room for Pastafarianism. This is also the area in which the 'command to compare' functions. As Laycock has written,

[b]y inventing religion as a “second order, generic concept,” the Western world also provided the possibility to manipulate the criteria ascribed to this category in order to create absurdities. In this sense, invented religions are an unintended by-product of the invention of religion.<sup>269</sup>

References to *universal religion* offers one way to make space for Pastafarianism in the category of religion. This can happen in many ways. Henderson posits transcendent experience at the core of religion, making it possible to diminish the importance of those (negatively perceived) features more commonly associated with religion, the importance of belief in particular. In Henderson’s usage this open-ended idea of religion offers room for many different interpretations of Pastafarianism, including but not limited to reductionist explanations. This open-endedness can make Pastafarianism appealing to those with more Atheist views<sup>270</sup> as well as to those who subscribe more to something akin to ‘spiritual not religious’ type of views. Henderson’s way of using this view on religion makes space for Pastafarianism in the category of religion on a level different from the obviously two-dimensional satire.

One important aspect of my study was how Pastafarianism is related to atheism, and how atheism in general was treated in Pastafarian writings. Generally, atheism was perceived as distinct from anti-religiosity, even though Henderson especially was quick to address this association. The most typical way to describe the relationship between Pastafarianism and Atheism was to say that they are different things but not necessarily incompatible. Some respondents were very outspoken about most Pastafarians being Atheists. Still, many emphasised that it is possible to be Atheist and Pastafarian at the same time. This is entirely logical if the definition of religion used is shifted away from (literal) belief to things like community and ritual. Several of my respondents mentioned that there are also Pastafarians who see the movement as being anti-religion, and some of them expressed negative views on religion in general. A couple of respondents also described Pastafarianism as being more about agnosticism, keeping one’s mind open, and not taking oneself too seriously. Still, when it comes to the relationship between Pastafarianism and Atheism, the general tone of the writings was a “whatever floats your boat so long as it doesn’t sink mine” type of liberal stance. As

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<sup>269</sup> Laycock 2013, 20.

<sup>270</sup> Some of my respondents compared Atheism and Pastafarianism by stating that atheists tend to be ‘angry’ or otherwise lack the humour and laid-back attitude that was considered central to Pastafarianism. Within the constraints of this research, I could not pursue this description further, but it may be that there is a certain stereotype of an “angry atheist” at play. It is possible that Pastafarianism is a good fit for some of those people who share atheist views but for some reason wish to avoid the image of an angry atheist.

Cusack has pointed out, they are keen on defending “Enlightenment rationality and scientific objectivity”.<sup>271</sup> An overwhelming majority of European Pastafarians especially also emphasise the need to protect a secular public sphere. The underlying ethos expressed may vary between more assertive secularism and ‘secularity for safeguarding individual liberties’, to borrow the terminology developed by Schuh et al.<sup>272</sup>

## 6.2 Counterreligion revisited

My original idea of counterreligion was relatively two-dimensional. As its starting point was Casanova’s idea of deprivatisation. Counterreligion, then, was meant to describe the way Pastafarians also enter the public sphere and, by mimicking established religious institutions and campaigning for equal rights, illuminate the way the state or public authorities grant rights and privileges to certain religious groups and exclude others.<sup>273</sup> My idea was not very far from Joseph Laycock’s description of parody religions and their command to compare-logic. Although I elaborated on it very little at the time, one dimension of my work was also an attempt to argue that while ‘counter’ is an important part of the movement – it is countering something – it is not simply a mirror image, but also rapidly creating its own, relatively independent content. In the end, although counterreligion describes well the tactics of Pastafarians, it suffers from the same problems of ambiguity as ‘parody religion’ and as such does not offer much new insight into the ambiguous side of the movement.

The dimension and operative logic of countering certainly exists in Pastafarianism, and the parodic ‘command to compare’ is central to it. This is the part Ethan G. Quillen has examined and connected to certain types of Atheist discourse. Still, there are other layers to the movement, and it draws on many interesting discursive sources, avoiding simple categorisations of ‘real’ and ‘not real’, ‘religion’ and ‘parody’. In fact, I would argue that much of the effectiveness and appeal of Pastafarianism derives from its open-

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<sup>271</sup> Cusack 2010.

<sup>272</sup> Schuh et al. 2012; see also Lehtinen 2017 for another application of these models, this time to the Dutch public reaction to the Atheist Bus Campaign of 2009.

<sup>273</sup> Whether this was perceived by Pastafarians as a genuine problem of equality (same rights for all) or a problem of religious institutions operating in areas considered ‘public’ (because religion is supposed to be a private matter) varied among the respondents, and was not much elaborated on.

endedness and creative use of different ideas of religion. It constructs new “middle grounds”<sup>274</sup> in which it is possible to say, for instance, that one can be religious and Atheist at the same time. For instance, the discourse on religion in Henderson's writing is not atheism-leaning in its entirety, and the arguments he puts forward draw from different sources. Some even seem to share common ideas with the sort of fluid contemporary spirituality that emphasises individual authority and mixes ideas and traditions from various sources. It is this layering of different discourses that makes Pastafarianism so open for many kinds of uses and does not necessarily confine it to only certain kinds of discourses on religion and non-religion or atheism. While counterreligion can be one part of Pastafarianism, there is also another dimension in which the category boundary itself is suspended and Pastafarianism placed somewhere beyond that distinction. While Pastafarianism has certain shock value, it is hardly unique in this regard. There is an increasing interest in the middle space in religious studies. Common binaries like sacred/secular, religion/non-religion, and private/public have been scrutinised in a new way and this has shown that what has been construed as binary doesn't necessarily hold when one examines the actual, lived practises and attitudes of people.<sup>275</sup>

### 6.3 The end is not the end is not the

This exploration of Pastafarianism and the language Pastafarian practitioners use when describing religion(s) and its others has been a challenging one. Apart from the sheer scope of the theoretical context, combining different kinds of materials has been one of the toughest nuts to crack, especially taken together with cultural differences and language barriers, both factors that cause noise in the analysis and are difficult to correct for. In order to adjust for this noise, I have especially with the interviews kept the analysis at a relatively rough level. This has been enough to construct certain patterns in how the respondents relate to questions of Pastafarianism, religion, and atheism. The number of respondents has been helpful here.

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<sup>274</sup> Day et al 2013.

<sup>275</sup> Day et al 2013.

Should I start the process again now, I would do many things differently. Most importantly, I would focus my interviews more. Still, as it sometimes happens, the exact point of interest can only be specified after delving into more general mass of information. Due to time limitations, I have decided to work with the preliminary, general responses I received, rather than try and gather follow-up answers with more specific questions.

Despite all the challenges, I think the perspective I have chosen is a step in the right direction. I do think a study of Pastafarianism offers insight not only to the movement itself but to a multitude of different contemporary ideas and discourses on religion and how these discursive strands are creatively mixed and shifted. What became obvious is that Pastafarianism is something borrowed and something new. And even though it connects to more unambiguously Atheist discourses on religion, it has also remained interestingly elusive. Pastafarianism avoids simple categorisations, partially because of the open source nature of the movement, but also because of the way Bobby Henderson has used different discursive tools to leave the movement open-ended enough to allow for various interpretations. Pastafarianism is a work in progress and only time will tell, what kind of forms and interpretations will become the established ones – if any. Apart from Pastafarianism itself, studying this movement can also offer insights to different contemporary ways of perceiving religion, from certain new Atheist discourses on religion to a more fluid, individual spirituality –leaning ideas, similar to what New Age and Neo-pagan groups could well use. Two interesting points I think should be pursued further are, first, a more in-depth analysis of the types of humour employed in Pastafarian discourses and the functions they can have and, second, a more thorough examination of what Pastafarians understand with the category of “atheism”.

‘Religion’ is on the move, and even if this is a relatively small and peculiar phenomenon hacking away at what it might mean, it will be interesting to see where it goes. I conclude with Carole Cusack’s apt remark:

[B]ut in a religious landscape where Pagans do magical workings based on Tolkien's Elves from the Lord of the Rings and Chaos magicians



invoke the Teletubbies, the intention of the author is hardly relevant as the adherents will put the text to whatever use they desire.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Cusack 2010, 138.

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## LIST OF PICTURES

**Picture 1. "Grownups" by xkcd.**

Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 2.5 License. URL:

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## APPENDIX

### APPENDIX 1. Interview template

#### **Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster in Europe**

First, if you'd be so kind as to provide a bit of background information:

- Name

(This is just so I remember which answer came from where. If you wish, you can be completely anonymised from the actual research. Else I will be referring to individuals with first name & country only where necessary.)

- Age if convenient
- Position in the Pastafarian movement if any
- A bit of personal history: When did you become involved with the movement?

#### *Section I – General information*

The following questions are relatively broad - you may reply as shortly or as broadly as you think is best. Don't worry about going off-topic! All information is relevant for my research at this stage. If one or more questions are somehow irrelevant to you or you do not wish to answer for any reason, just skip.

1. Could you provide a short time line of the Pastafarian community in COUNTRY – When and how did it start? Were there important milestones, campaigns or other events that shaped the movement? What is the current status of the church in COUNTRY?
2. How many people would you say are actively involved in the CFMSM in COUNTRY? What is your estimate based on? Do you have membership registers or other sources to indicate any definite numbers?
3. What is the structure of the COUNTRY CFMSM community like? Where do you usually meet and communicate?

4. What does your community do? You can list all kinds of activities you can think of. Some examples might be:

- Updating a blog/website
- Having regular gatherings
- Producing pamphlets and other material, translating material
- Public campaigns, big and small (handing out flyers, campaigning for pasta strainer driver's license photos.)
- ...anything you can think of, basically.

5. Why do you do what you do? What kind of goals does the CFMSM in COUNTRY have? Do you want to achieve some political change, for example?

6. What has the public response been like in COUNTRY? Have you received any media attention? Has it been positive or negative? What kind of people or instances usually pay attention to you? (Such as state officials, other religious groups...)

7. Would you say that COUNTRY Pastafarians are also active internationally? Do you have connections to Pastafarians in neighbouring countries for example?

8. What kind of relations do you have with other religious groups, non-religious, secular or Atheist groups both in COUNTRY and abroad? Any cooperation, any tensions or arguments? Have you stepped on someone's toes?

9. Is there mainly one community or are there several? Are there any tensions or strife among COUNTRY Pastafarians, or do you mostly agree on stuff?

### *Section II – Reflection*

1. Why do you personally think the CFMSM is as popular as it is? What kind of reasons could you see for people to be interested in it and to become involved? You can answer this question both in general and with regards to COUNTRY in particular. You can also tell your own motivations if you'd like.

2. Do you think there are differences between the CFSM communities in Europe and, for example, in the United States? What about different European nations? Is the COUNTRY community somehow different from others? Why might this be?
3. CFSM is often associated with Atheism. Many argue that it is, essentially, an Atheist joke or a variant of Atheism. What are your thoughts on the relationship between CFSM and Atheism? Are they really one and the same?
4. Free word. What should I have asked? Any questions, comments, other information you think might be relevant – hit it!

If you'd like to include links or other references, please feel free to do so. If there is anyone else you know who is interested in answering these questions, you can distribute these questions to them freely. Just please let me know in that case.

Thank you for your time and effort! I will keep you updated on the project.

## APPENDIX 2. Description of analysing process, reader-friendly version

Response to question	Close reading
<p>1 Pastafarians don't tell people what to do</p> <p>2 as we believe that everyone has some kind of ethical compass in ourselves.</p> <p>3 Add to this that our Deity the FSM doesn't demand worship, sacrifices or money</p> <p>4 He just wants for you to be happy and</p> <p>5 let others be happy in their own way</p> <p>6 without forcing your belief on them.</p> <p>7 In this we differ from almost all religions and philosophies on Earth.</p>	<p>Pastafarianism is not authoritarian Individuals know what is right. [Implicit:] consequently, no authority is needed to define this for them. [implicit:] there are other, in some way comparable communities in which these things are required (perhaps by 'deities') and this is undesirable. [opposite to previous:] the FSM wants you to 'be happy' instead of worshipping, making sacrifices, and/or giving him money in some form. Different people can have their own way of being happy; this should be allowed. [liberal, individualistic; positive] 'Forcing' your beliefs on someone else is not desirable [imposition of one's own beliefs on others; negative] Explicitly expressing what was implicitly stated already: Pastafarianism is different from 'religions and philosophies': * Others 'tell people what to do' - they don't * Others demand worship, sacrifices, or money - they don't * Others are not content with everyone 'just being happy' - they are * Others wish to impose their views on others - they don't.</p>



## **Tiivistelmä pro gradu-tutkielmasta**

### **Johdanto**

Tutkin Pro gradu -tutkielmassani Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkkoa, jonka seuraajia kutsutaan myös pastafareiksi. Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkko sai alkunsa vuonna 2005 Yhdysvalloissa. Kansain opetuslautakunta (*school board*) päätti sallia nk. älykkään suunnittelun (*intelligent design*) opetuksen evoluutioteorian rinnalla osavaltion julkisten koulujen luonnontieteiden opetuksessa. Bobby Henderson lähetti lautakunnalle avoimen kirjeen, jossa hän ilmaisi huolensa siitä, että oppilaille opetettaisiin vain yhtä älykkään suunnittelun muotoa. Henderson kertoi kirjeessään, että hän ja ”monet muut” uskovat Lentäväksi spagettihirviöksi kutsutun yliluonnollisen olennon olevan maailmankaikkeuden luoja ja siis älykkään suunnittelun teoriassa keskeinen älykäs suunnittelija.

Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkkoa pidetään yleisesti parodiauskontona, ja monet tuntevat sen lähinnä perinteisiä uskontoja kritisoivana vitsinä, joka on erityisen suosittu internetissä. Kirkolla on kuitenkin aktiivisia kannattajia ympäri maailmaa. Monet eurooppalaiset pastafariyhteisöt pyrkivät saamaan virallisen uskonnollisen yhteisön statuksen. Tällaisen statuksen on saavuttanut muun muassa Alankomaiden *Kerk van het Vliegend Spaghettimonster* vuonna 2016. Lisäksi monet pastafariyhteisöt järjestävät erilaisia kokoontumisia, tapahtumia ja kampanjoita. Eräs paljon medianäkyvyyttä saanut tapaus oli itävaltalaisen Niko Almin ajokorttikuva, jossa mies esiintyy pastasiivilä päässään. Alm vaati saada käyttää pastasiivilää vedoten sääntöön, jonka mukaan uskonnolliset päähineet voivat olla hyväksyttäviä ajokorttikuvassa, vaikka yleisesti päähineet eivät ole sallittuja.

Tutkimuksessani analysoin pastafarien tapaa kertoa liikkeestään. Tarkastelen erityisesti sitä, miten he puhuvat uskonnosta ja ateismista, sekä miten he sijoittavat pastafarianismin suhteessa näihin kategorioihin. Tutkimuskysymykseni kuuluu: miten pastafarit tuottavat uskonnon ja ateismin kategorioita kerronnassaan, ja miten ja millä keinoin he sijoittavat liikkeensä suhteessa näihin kategorioihin?

### **Teoriatausta**

Työni teoreettiset lähtökohdat perustuvat sosiaaliseen konstruktionismiin ja diskurssiteoreettiseen lähestymistapaan. Teoriataustan muodostamisessa olen hyödyntänyt etenkin Craig Martinin, Kocku von Stuckradin ja Teemu Tairan näkemyksiä. Tutkimuskohteeni on kieli, ja lähtökohtanani on se sosiaalisen konstruktionismin peruseriaate, että kielenkäyttö ei milloinkaan ole täysin neutraalia ulkopuolella olevan objektiivisen maailman kuvailua. Kielen käytön tavat tuottavat aktiivisesti maailmaa ympärillämme ja määrittävät, miten erilaisia ilmiöitä ymmärrämme. Periaatteessa tavat hahmottaa maailmaa ovat rajattomat, mutta kielenkäytön sosiaalisen luonteen vuoksi tietyt tavat ovat laajemmalle levinneitä ja käytettyjä kuin toiset. Nämä tavat muodostuvat historian prosesseissa ja osana yhteisöjen valtasuhteita, ja ne vakiintuvat erityisesti koodautuessaan yhteisön instituutioihin. Myös uskonnon käsite on niin sanottu tyhjä merkittäjä (empty signifier), joka voidaan periaatteessa täyttää millä tahansa merkityssisällöllä. Käytännössä kuitenkin käsitteen merkitykset – jotka ovat usein keskenään ristiriitaisia ja tilanteen mukaan vaihtelevia – ovat melko vakiintuneita. Teemu Tairan diskurssin määritelmää mukaillen kutsun tätä melko vakiintunutta, osin instituutioihin kietoutunutta, mutta kuitenkin luonteeltaan muovautuvaa merkitysten verkkoa *uskontodiskurssiksi*.<sup>277</sup> Tutkimukseni keskittyy juuri tämän uskontodiskurssin tai sen erilaisten osadiskurssien tarkasteluun pastafarien kerronnassa.

### **Metodi, aineisto ja eettiset kysymykset**

Tutkimusaineistoni koostuu Bobby Hendersonin Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkon internetsivuilla julkaistuista teksteistä, lyhyestä animaatiovideosta, sekä kahdestakymmenestä eurooppalaisen pastafarin sähköposti- tai pikaviestihaastattelusta. Lisäksi yksi haastattelu tehtiin Skype-puheluna. Haastateltavia on kaikkiaan kymmenestä maasta: Alankomaista (1 haastateltava), Belgiasta (1), Espanjasta (1), Italiasta (10), Itävallasta (1), Norjasta (1), Puolasta (1), Saksasta (1), Tanskasta (1) ja Turkista (2). Lisäksi keskustelin yhden venäläisen pastafarin kanssa, mutta tätä keskustelua ei ole tallennettu eikä käytetty tutkimusaineistona.

Tutkimusmetodini on diskurssianalyysi. Olen hyödyntänyt myös sisällönanalyysiä apumenetelmänä, jonka avulla olen ensin lajitellut ja jäsennellyt aineistoani. Analyysissä olen keskittynyt erityisesti kategoriarajauksiin: miten vastaajat luonnehtivat

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<sup>277</sup> Taira 2016a, 126.

esimerkiksi uskontoa, mikä sisältyy uskonnon kategoriaan ja mikä on sille vastakkaista, sekä miten pastafarianismi sijoitetaan suhteessa uskonnon tai ei-uskonnon kategorioihin. Tutkimukseeni liittyviä rajoituksia ovat muun muassa aineiston hankinnan keskittyminen internetlähteisiin. Lisäksi englannin kielen käyttäminen rajoittaa paitsi haastateltavien valikoitumista mukaan tutkimukseen, myös kielenkäytön analysoinnin tarkkuutta. Sekä tutkijalle että vastaajille ei-äidinkielen käyttäminen vaikuttaa väistämättä analyysiin, vaikka tarkkaa vaikutusta ei ole mahdollista arvioida.

Tutkimukseen liittyviä eettisiä kysymyksiä ovat haastateltavien kohtelua ja aineiston valintaa ja käsittelyä koskevat kysymykset. Toinen puoli tutkimuksenteon etiikassa on sanankäytön valta ja sen position huomioiminen, joka minulla on tutkijana ja akateemisen tutkimuksen edustajana. Tuon tutkimukseen mukaan tiettyjä taustaoletuksia, jotka kumpuavat omasta taustastani ja persoonastani, mutta myös akateemisesta yhteisöstä ja koulutuksestani.

Huomioin tutkimuksessani materiaalin valintaa ja haastateltavien kanssa viestimistä koskevia kysymyksiä parhaani mukaan. Valitsin aineistoja, jotka ovat julkisia ja vapaasti saatavilla. Haastateltavilleni kerroin avoimesti, kuka olen, millainen akateeminen taustani on ja mitä olen tekemässä. Kerroin haastateltavilleni, että heidän on mahdollista esiintyä tutkimuksessa täysin anonyymeina, että tutkimukseen osallistumisesta voi kieltäytyä missä vaiheessa tahansa, mihin tahansa kysymykseen voi jättää vastaamatta, ja että valmis tutkielma tullaan julkaisemaan sähköisesti sen valmistuttua. Lupasin myös toimittaa valmiin tutkielman haastateltaville. Pidän osin eettisenä päätöksenä myös sitä, että olen kirjoittanut tutkielman englanniksi. Näin tutkittavani voivat tutustua tutkimukseen. Kokoamani haastatteluaineisto on arkistoitu Turun yliopiston kulttuurien tutkimuksen arkistoon.

### **Tutkimuksellisen kontekstin rakentaminen**

Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkkoa ei useinkaan mielletä oikeaksi uskonnoksi, vaikka sen kannattajat yleensä vakuuttavat olevansa vakavissaan. Esimerkiksi Suomen pastafarinen kirkko sai hylkäävän päätöksen hakiessaan rekisteröidyn uskonnollisen yhteiskunnan

asemaa.<sup>278</sup> Minkä vuoksi Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkkoa ei pidetä oikeana uskontona? Väitän tämän johtuvan siitä, että Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkko rikkoo tiettyjä kulttuurissamme keskeisiä kategorisia rajanvetoja. Se yhdistelee elementtejä, joiden katsomme yleensä kuuluvan erilleen. Tällaisia ongelmallisia kategoriarajojen ylityksiä ovat seuraavat:

1. Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkko on ihmisten keksimä.
2. Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkko on vitsi tai parodiaa/satiiria.
3. Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkko on poliittinen liike.
4. Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkon jäsenet ovat yleensä (myös) ateisteja.

Nämä piirteet sotivat totuttuja uskontokäsityksiä vastaan. Ensinnäkin uskonnon katsotaan yleensä enemmän tai vähemmän perustuvan uskolle johonkin oppiin tai käsitykseen maailman luonteesta ja mahdollisesti oikeasta moraalista. Vaikka Bobby Henderson onkin kirjeessään Kansasin opetuslautakunnalle kirjoittanut, että kirkko on ollut olemassa jo tuhansia vuosia, useimmat pastafarit ovat valmiita myöntämään, että liike syntyi Hendersonin avoimen kirjeen ja vuotta myöhemmin kirjoitetun Lentävän spagettihirviön evankeliumin<sup>279</sup> myötä. Tällä tavoin avoimesti ”keksitty uskonto” voi tuntua oudolta, jos uskontoa ajatellaan pitkälti protestanttiseen kristillisyyteen perustuen uskona johonkin yliluonnolliseen tai normaalein aistein tavoittamattomaan todellisuuteen.

Jos uskonnoissa tulisi olla kysymys vakavasta uskomisesta johonkin tiettyyn oppiin, myös huumorin liittäminen osaksi tätä kuvaa voi olla intuitionvastaista. Uskonnon ja huumorin suhde nähdään usein vastakkainasetteluna, jossa huumorin keinoin kyseenalaistetaan uskonnon oppeja ja auktoriteettia. Tästä Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkossakin luultavasti useimmiten katsotaan olevan kyse, etenkin, koska sen hyödyntämä parodinen tai satiirinen huumori on hyvin samanlaista kuin aikaisemmissa vastaavissa, mutta selkeämmin ateistisiksi identifioituissa liikkeissä. Ethan G. Quillen on tutkinut tätä diskursiivista tekniikkaa ja sen historiaa. Huumoria on kuitenkin monia lajeja ja sillä voi olla monia funktioita. Ei ole vaikea löytää esimerkkejä uskonnollisista liikkeistä, joiden opeissa ja rituaaleissa esiintyy myös huumoria. Esimerkiksi zen-

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<sup>278</sup> “Lyhyt selostus rekisteröinnin etenemisestä”. Suomen Pastafarinen Kirkko. Internetsivu. Julkaistu 10. kesäkuuta 2010. URL: <https://pastafarismi.wordpress.com/2010/06/10/57/> [Tarkistettu 20. helmikuuta 2018].

<sup>279</sup> The Gospel of the Flying Spaghetti Monster. Henderson 2006, Villard Books.

buddhalaisuuden rinzai-koulukunnan jotkut edustajat ovat harrastaneet humoristisia tarinoita, joiden tarkoituksena on rikkoa totuttuja ajatuskuvioita ja johdattaa kohti valaistumista.<sup>280</sup> Pohjois-Amerikan alkuperäiskansojen mytologioista löytyy myös useita nk. triksterhahmoja, joista kerrotut tarinat ovat samanaikaisesti humoristisia, mutta myös keskeisiä ja tärkeitä yhteisön mytologiassa.<sup>281</sup>

Pastafarianismin poliittinen agenda on kenties keskeisin syy sille, minkä vuoksi sitä ei useinkaan pidetä oikeana uskontona. Modernissa yhteiskuntajärjestyksessä uskontoa ja politiikkaa on totuttu pitämään erillisinä siten, että uskonnon katsotaan olevan ensisijaisesti yksilön oma asia, yksityisen piiriin kuuluvaa toimintaa, johon julkisella vallalla ei ole oikeutta puuttua. Poliittikka puolestaan nähdään julkisen alueena, jolla argumentoidaan rationaalisin perustein, eikä esimerkiksi jumalan tahtoon vetoaminen ole kelvollinen poliittinen argumentti. Pastafarien toiminta on usein luonteeltaan julkista ja myös kapeammin poliittista sikäli, kuin he pyrkivät saavuttamaan valtion tunnustaman, virallisen aseman uskonnollisena yhteisönä. Toisaalta on selvää, että uskonnot eivät suinkaan pysytele yksityisen piirissä, vaan näkyvät enenevässä määrin myös julkisessa tilassa ja politiikan kentillä. Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkko toimii itse asiassa monessa suhteessa samoin kuin uskonnolliset yhteisöt, jotka myöskin usein pyrkivät saamaan äänensä kuuluviin julkisessa keskustelussa ja poliittisissa keskusteluissa.

Uskonnon uusi julkisuus tai ”deprivatisaatio”, kuten José Casanova on ilmiötä kuvannut, on herättänyt paljon hämmennystä myös tutkijoiden keskuudessa. Aiempi teoria uskonnon merkityksen asteittaisesta vähenemisestä yhteiskunnan sekularisoituessa on kyseenalaistettu ja puhutaan jopa jälki- tai postsekulaarista yhteiskunnasta. Tämä hämmennys on kuitenkin ohjannut uskonnon tutkimusta yhä enemmän sen tarkempaan tarkasteluun, miten yksityisen ja julkisen rajanveto itse asiassa tapahtuu, ja mitä niin kutsuttu ”maallinen” uskonnollisen vastakohtana oikeastaan konkreettisesti tarkoittaa. Craig Martin on tarkastellut kriittisesti yksityisen ja julkisen rajanvetoa ja on todennut, että ”yksityisen ja julkisen rajanvedosta puhuminen on suurin piirtein yhtä sofistikoitunutta kuin puhe neljästä perusnesteestä”.<sup>282</sup> Hänen mukaansa erityisesti liberaalit poliittiset keskustelijat tapaavat vedota diskurssiin, jonka mukaan uskonto on todellisuudessa yksityistä, ja jos uskonto

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<sup>280</sup> Cusack 2010, 49–50.

<sup>281</sup> Wikström 2004, 277–284.

<sup>282</sup> Martin 2010, 157. Käännös kirjoittajan.

esiintyy julkisen alueella, se toimii jollain tavalla väärin tai sitten uskontoa jollakin tavalla ”vääristellään” tai ”käytetään” poliittisiin tarkoituksiin. Martin huomauttaa, että tällainen diskurssi on sokea sille tosiasialle, että uskonnollisten yhteisöjen toiminta on tyypillisesti luonteeltaan julkista ja poliittista, eikä vetoaminen siihen, että ”uskonnon tulisi olla yksityistä” (vaikka se ei sitä selkeästikään aina ole) ole tehokas argumentti, jos uskonnollisten yhteisöjen poliittista toimintaa ja vaikutusvaltaa halutaan kyseenalaistaa.

Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkko tekee toiminnallaan näkyväksi juuri tätä puolta uskonnollisten yhteisöjen todellisessa, mutta usein totunnaisuudessaan näkymättömässä roolissa eri yhteiskunnissa. Toisaalta silloinkin, kun uskonnollinen yhteisö toimii julkisen piirissä tai poliittisesti, yleensä ajatellaan, että uskonnolla on myös jonkinlainen muu sisältö, oppi tai arvot, joihin muu toiminta perustuu. Jos Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkko nähdään ”pelkkänä” poliittisena protestina, ajatus poliittisuuden ja uskonnollisuuden toisensa poissulkevuudesta voi edelleen vaikuttaa siihen, että sitä ei nähdä ”oikeana uskontona”.

Neljäs ongelmallinen kategoriarajan ylitys liittyy sekin uskonnon määrittelyn kysymyksiin. Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkko liitetään usein ateismiin. Esimerkiksi Saksassa paikallinen Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkko on sekulaarin Giordano Bruno -järjestön jäsen. Tunnettu ateisti Richard Dawkins on kirjoituksissaan kommentoinut myönteisesti Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkkoa. Monet pastafarit identifioituvat myös ateisteiksi. Mitä käsite ”ateismi” sitten pitää sisällään, ja miksi ateismi ja uskonto eivät sovi samaan kategoriaan? Jos uskonnon kategoriassa keskeistä on juuri uskomisen jumalaan, johonkin korkeampaan voimaan tai tavallisin aistein tavoittamattomaan todellisuuteen, ateismi nähdään usein juuri tällaisen uskomisen vastakohtana. Jo sana ateismi viittaa jumaluskon puuttumiseen, ja toisinaan ateismi yhdistetään yleisemmin uskonnonvastaisuuteen. Toisaalta, jos uskonnon keskeiseksi sisällöksi määritellään opin tai uskomisen sijaan esimerkiksi rituaalit, yhteisöllisyys tai vaikkapa moraalikäsitteet, ei ateismi (ei-uskomisen merkityksessä) ole mahdoton osa yhtälöä. Yhtenä tunnettuna esimerkkinä ja uskonnon stereotyyppiä sotkevana perinteenä onkin usein pidetty buddhalaisuutta, jossa ei ainakaan sen kaikissa muodoissa varsinaisesti uskota jumaliin tai korkeampaan todellisuuteen.

Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkko rikkoo siis perinteisiä käsityksiä siitä, mitä mielletään uskonnoksi. Toisaalta niin uskonnon tutkijat kuin muutkin uskonnon ilmiöitä

havainnoivat henkilöt ovat jatkuvasti pyrkineet tavoittamaan uskontoilmiöön liittyviä mahdollisuuksia monipuolisemmin ja kyseenalaistamaan stereotyyppisiä käsityksiä uskonnosta, jotka perustuvat pitkälti tiettyihin kristinuskon perinteisiin. Myös pastafarit tuottavat vastaavanlaisia argumentteja, jotka toisaalta kyseenalaistavat tiettyjä totuttuja uskontokäsityksiä, toisaalta voivat vahvistaa toisia.

## **Analyysi**

Analyysin ensimmäisessä osassa käsittelen Bobby Hendersonin omaa Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkkoon keskittyvää verkkosivua, tarkemmin sen ”About”-alisivua, jolla esitellään kirkko pääpiirteissään sekä vastataan joihinkin ilmeisesti usein esitettyihin kysymyksiin. Sivulla on myös lyhyt animaatio, joka kertoo perusasioita Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkosta. Videon on tuottanut Matt Tillman.

Sivun pääasiallinen viesti on, että Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkko on todellinen, vakavasti otettava uskonto. Henderson viljelee runsaasti myös pastafareille tunnusomaista huumoria, mutta käyttää kirjoittaessaan myös vakavampaa äänensävyä. Sijoittaessaan Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkon uskonnon kategoriaan Henderson hyödyntää neljää erilaista diskursiivista tekniikkaa, joita kutsun nyansoinniksi (*nuancing*), siirtämiseksi (*shifting*), strategiseksi rinnastamiseksi (*strategic equating*) sekä strategiseksi avoimuudeksi (*strategic open-endedness*).

Ensinnäkin Henderson puhuu uskonnosta ja uskonnollisista ihmisistä – mukaan lukien pastafarit – avaamalla esiin erilaisia spektrejä. Hän huomauttaa esimerkiksi, että kaikissa uskonnollisissa yhteisöissä osa jäsenistä uskoo kirjaimellisesti, toiset vertauskuvallisemmin. Hän avaa myös uskonnon kategoriaa ja tuo esiin, että uskonnossa voi olla opin lisäksi kysymys yhtä hyvin yhteisöllisyydestä ja henkisyiden kokemuksista. Painottaessaan kahden jälkimmäisen merkitystä ensimmäisen kustannuksella hän käyttää siirtämistaktiikkaa, ja verratessaan Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkkoa muihin uskontoihin hän hyödyntää strategista rinnastamista. Tämä tekniikka on hyvin samanlainen kuin mitä Laycock kutsuu nimellä määräys verrata (*command to compare*).<sup>283</sup> Henderson vetoaa käsitykseen uskonnon yleisestä ytimestä jonkinlaisena henkilökohtaisena henkisyiden kokemuksena. Hän jättää kuitenkin avoimeksi, mistä tällainen kokemus voisi kummuta, jättäen tilaa niin reduktionistisemmille kuin

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<sup>283</sup> Laycock 2013,20.

avoimemmille tulkinnoille, jopa jonkinlaiselle uushenkisyysdiskurssille. On lisäksi huomionarvoista, että problematisoidessaan kirjaimellisen uskomisen vaatimusta Henderson ottaa esiin ”kultit ja uskonnolliset petokset, joissa johtajat huijaavat seuraajilta rahat”, joissa hänen mukaansa seuraajat todella uskovat. Tässä Henderson näyttää rakentavan jonkinlaista yhteistä vihollista ja pyrkivän kenties voittamaan puolelleen uskontoon jollain tavalla maltillisesti suhtautuvia uskovia.

Henderson ottaa esiin myös ateismin ja pastafarien suhteen. Hän korostaa voimakkaasti Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkon ja ateismin erillisyyttä ja sitä, että kysymys ei ole uskonnonvastaisuudesta. Hän huomauttaa, että kirkolla on jäseninään paitsi ateisteja, myös agnostikkoja, vapaa-ajattelijoita, sekä useiden eri uskontokuntien edustajia. Henderson korostaa yleisemminkin, ettei kirkolla ole mitään uskontoa vastaan – vain ”hulluja järjettömyyksiä, joita uskonnon nimissä tehdään”. Hendersonin tapa puhua uskonnosta vastaa hyvin Martinin kuvaamaa tyypillisesti liberaalia uskontodiskurssia, jossa uskonto sinänsä kuvataan hyvänä tai neutraalina, ja puhujan näkökulmasta ei-toivottavat puolet nähdään taas jonkinlaisena uskonnon väärinkäyttönä. Tällainen diskurssi antaa kuitenkin tilaa myös uskonnollisiksi itsensä mieltäville henkilöille. Kukin kun voi määritellä mielensä mukaan, missä uskonnon ”väärinkäytön” raja kulkee.

Matt Tillmanin esittelyvideossa mielenkiintoisia piirteitä olivat muun muassa uskonnon ja tieteen rinnastaminen siten, että molempien katsotaan tarjoavan vastauksia ihmisen pohtimiin ”suuriin kysymyksiin”. Tämä näkemys tuntuu heijastavan funktionaalista käsitystä uskonnosta perimmäisten huolenaiheiden (*ultimate concern*) kenttänä. Video kuvaa, miten tiede toisaalta tuottaa kaiken aikaa tietoa, mutta ei välttämättä sellaista selkeää kokonaiskuvaa, jota ihminen ehkä toivoisi. Uskonnot puolestaan esitetään ongelmallisina siksi, että ”kun on niin monta mistä valita, mistä tiedämme millä niistä, jos millään, on oikeat vastaukset?” Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkko esitellään epämääräisesti tieteen ja uskonnon parhaat puolet yhteensovittavana ”empiirisenä uskonnollisena liikkeenä”, mutta tätä sovittamista ei varsinaisesti eksplikoida sen enempää. Lentävä spagettihirviö ja liikkeen keskeiset opit esitellään tiiviisti sekä luvataan, että mikäli Lentävä spagettihirviö ei 30 päivän kokeilun jälkeen ole osoittautunut toimivaksi vaihtoehdoksi, ”vanha jumalasi ottaa sinut todennäköisesti takaisin”. Ateismia videossa ei käsitellä millään tavalla.



Eurooppalaisten pastafarien haastatteluissa näkyi jonkin verran hajontaa ja eroja suhteessa Hendersonin tapaan puhua uskonnosta ja ateismista. Koska pastafarianismilla ei ole varsinaista kattavaa organisaatiota eikä ylintä valvovaa elintä, se toimii avoimena kulttuurisena resurssina, jota kukin voi vapaasti käyttää ja kehittää haluamaansa suuntaan.

Haastatteluvastauksissa näkyi jonkin verran hajontaa siinä, miten pastafarianismi suhteutettiin uskonnon kategoriaan. Samoin erilaisia uskontodiskursseja esiintyi. Koska en kysynyt suoranaisesti uskonnon määrittelystä tai uskontoon liittyviä ajatuksia, uskontoon liittyvät käsitykset tulivat esiin yleensä epäsuorasti, kun vastaajat kuvailivat Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkkoa ja usein vertailivat sitä toisiin uskontoihin. Yleisimmin Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkko määriteltiin uskonnoksi, mutta kuitenkin selkeästi toisenlaiseksi uskonnoksi kuin toiset uskonnot. Nämä ”toiset uskonnot” kuvattiin usein suoraan tai epäsuorasti autoritaarisina, vanhanaikaisina, diskriminoivina ja rajoittavina, kun taas Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkon katsottiin tarjoavan vapautta, suvaitsevaisuutta, yksilöllisyyttä sekä puhuttelevia moraalisia arvoja. Useimmat vastaajat pitivät juuri oppia tai uskoa keskeisenä uskontoa määrittävänä tekijänä, vaikka jotkut toivat myös esiin uskonnon muita ulottuvuuksia, kuten rituaaleja tai yhteisöllisyyttä. Muutama vastaaja suhtautui uskontoon, etenkin ”järjestäytyneeseen uskontoon” hyvin negatiivisesti, mutta monet korostivat, ettei heillä ollut mitään kenenkään uskomuksia vastaan, kunhan ketään ei pakoteta uskomaan vastoin tahtoaan.

Hendersonin painotukset yksityisen ja julkisen rajanvedosta koulutuksen ja tieteen sekä uskonnon välillä eivät olleet yhtä selvästi näkyvillä eurooppalaisten vastaajien kirjoituksissa. Vastauksissa keskityttiin enemmän (tiettyjen) uskonnollisten instituutioiden valtioiden sanktioimaan erityisasemaan ja sen problematisointiin.

Kysyin haastattelussa vastaajilta suoraan, onko Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkko heidän mielestään ateismin muoto, sekä miten he kuvaisivat ateismin ja kirkon suhdetta. Vaikka suurin osa vastaajista kiisti väittämän, jonka mukaan Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkko olisi ateismia, he yleisesti ottaen suhtautuivat ateismiin vähemmän torjuvasti kuin Henderson tekstissään. He eivät myöskään yhdistäneet ateismia yhtä voimakkaasti uskonnonvastaisuuteen. Monet kertoivat olevansa itse ateisteja ja pitävänsä ateismia ja pastafarianismia monella tavoin yhteensopivina, vaikka he osoittivat myös monia eroavaisuuksia. Lisäksi monet korostivat, että pastafari voi olla ateisti, mutta myös minkä tahansa muun uskonnon kannattaja. Vain yksi vastaaja erotti pastafarianismin

kokonaan uskonnon käsitteestä ja kuvasi sitä sanalla ”maailmankatsomus” (Weltanschauung). Sama vastaaja myös katsoi, että jokainen pastafari on automaattisesti myös ateisti. Kaksi vastaajaa ilmaisi myös suhtautuvansa vähintään joihinkin ateismin muotoihin varauksella tai negatiivisesti, sillä he katsoivat niiden olevan ”dogmaattisia” tai ”eräänlaista uskontoa”. Molemmat näistä vastaajista toivat vaihtoehtona esiin enemmän agnostista suhtautumistapaa.

Useimmat vastaajat sijoittivat Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkon uskonnon kategoriaan. Monet perustelivat tätä pyrkimällä osoittamaan, että kirkko täyttää jonkinlaisia formaaleja uskonnon kriteerejä. Toisaalta pastafarianismia kuvattiin myös tärkeiltä osin erilaiseksi kuin perinteiset uskonnot, jotka nähtiin tyypillisesti hyvin negatiivisessa valossa. Ateismiin suhtauduttiin yleisesti ottaen myönteisesti ja monet olivat myös sitä mieltä, että suurin osa pastafareista on ateisteja. Kaksi italialaista vastaajaa kuvasi pastafarianismia mielenkiintoisesti termeillä kuten ”inklusiivinen monoteismi” tai ”poly-monoteismi” ja pastafareja ”puoli-ateisteina”. Näitä termejä ei avattu vastauksissa sen enempää, mutta ne viittaavat mielenkiintoisella tavalla kategoriarajojen murtamiseen.

### **Johtopäätökset**

Erilaisia tapoja jäsentää uskonto joita pastafarit tavallisesti käyttivät, olivat järjestäytynyt tai institutionaalinen uskonto, yleismaailmallinen uskonto ja muodollinen uskonto. Institutionaalinen uskonto kuvattiin yleensä negatiivisena; perinteiset uskonnolliset instituutiot kuvattiin muun muassa autoritaarisina, vanhanaikaisina ja irrationaalisina. Yleismaailmallinen uskonto puolestaan viittaa ajatukseen, jonka mukaan on olemassa jokin uskonnon ydin, joka on kaikkien uskonnollisten perinteiden taustalla. Tämä ajatus saattoi painottua naturalististen selitysten suuntaan tai avoimempaan henkisyysdiskurssin suuntaan. Muodollinen uskonto taas liittyi tapaan puhua uskonnosta jonkinlaisen formaalin kriteeristön kautta, ja sitä käytettiin usein, kun viitattiin Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkon mahdollisuuksiin saada virallinen asema esimerkiksi valtionhallinnon silmissä.

Nämä eri tyypit sekoittuivat usein toisiinsa hyvin tiiviisti, mutta tavallista oli, että Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkko nähtiin yhteensopivana muodollisen uskonnon ja yleismaailmallisen uskonnon kanssa. Sen sijaan institutionaalinen uskonto nähtiin yleensä vastakkaisena pastafarianismille. Lentävän spagettihirviön kirkkoa kuvailtiin

usein houkuttelevana ja järkevänä vaihtoehtona juuri peilaamalla sitä implisiittisesti järjestäytyneen uskonnon negatiiviseen stereotypiaan.

Ateismiin suhtautuminen vaihteli pastafarien keskuudessa jonkin verran. Bobby Henderson korosti kirjoituksissaan voimakkaasti, ettei pastafarianismi ole ”ateistien kerho”. Myös haastatteluvastauksissa korostui ajatus, jonka mukaan ateismi on pastafarianismin kanssa yhteensopiva, muttei kuitenkaan sama asia. Vain yksi vastaaja oli sitä mieltä, että ”jokainen pastafari on automaattisesti myös ateisti”. Lisäksi monet vastaajat sanoivat uskovansa, että pastafarien enemmistö luultavasti on myös ateisteja. Tätä ei kuitenkaan pidetty välttämättömänä. Yleisesti suhtautuminen ateismiin ei ollut negatiivista, mutta jotkut vastaajat tuntuivat haluavan etäännyttää itsensä ateismista, jonka he katsoivat olevan ”dogmaattista” tai ”yhdenlaista uskontoa”.

Tärkeänä niin Henderson kuin haastattelemani pastafarit pitivät tietynlaista julkisen ja yksityisen rajanvetoa, jossa jokaisella on oikeus uskoa siihen, mihin haluaa, mutta joko kaikkien uskonnollisten instituutioiden tulisi pysytellä yksityisen piirissä ja poissa esimerkiksi politiikasta, tai sitten kaikille uskonnollisille näkemyksille tulisi antaa yhtäläinen sija julkisessa keskustelussa. Tämä vastaa hyvin Carole Cusackin havaintoa, jonka mukaan pastafarit puolustavat tietynlaista ”valistusliberalismia”<sup>284</sup>. Cora Schuh, Marian Burckhard ja Monika Wolfrab-Sahr ovat myös käsitelleet tämäntyyppistä sekularismia ja kuvanneet sitä termillä ”sekularismi yksilönvapauksien vuoksi” (*secularity for the sake of individual liberties*).<sup>285</sup> Craig Martin on kuitenkin omassa työssään kyseenalaistanut tällaisten kannanottojen tehokkuuden yhteiskunnissa, joissa tietyillä uskonnollisilla yhteisöillä kuitenkin tosiasiallisesti on enemmän vaikutusvaltaa kuin muilla.<sup>286</sup>

Lopuksi, vaikka pastafarianismia ja erityisesti sen tapaa toimia julkisessa tilassa voi hyvin kuvata termillä vastauskonto (*counterreligion*), on tämän termin selitysvoima mielestäni rajallinen. Vaikka vastauskonto kuvaa kapeampialaista ilmiötä (toimintastrategiaa) kuin ”parodiauskonto”, ja se voi joiltain osin kuvata pastafarianismia täsmällisemmin kuin jälkimmäinen termi, se ei kuitenkaan tarjoa kovin pitkälle menevää apua ilmiön jäsentelyyn. Olen taipuvainen olemaan samaa mieltä Joseph Laycockin kanssa siitä, että luokittelun ja yhteen niputtamisen sijaan olisi syytä

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<sup>284</sup> Cusack 2010.

<sup>285</sup> Schuh et al. 2012.

<sup>286</sup> Martin 2010.

tarkastella sitä, mikä kussakin keksityssä uskonossa tai parodiauskonnossa on erityistä.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Laycock 2013, 25.