

news

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Ousted creationist sues over website

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[WASHINGTON]

A Tennessee creationist is suing the operators of a popular physics website that refused to publish his alternative Big Bang hypothesis.

Robert Gentry, a lifelong Seventh-Day Adventist, filed the suit in the district court at Knoxville, Tennessee, against the operators of the arXiv preprint server, claiming that they refused a series of ten of his papers because of their religious content. Counsel representing the chief defendant, Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, says the claims have no merit and that the university has the right to choose what appears on the site.



Gentry, who has a masters degree in physics from the University of Florida, had papers in nuclear geophysics published in journals, including *Science* and *Nature*, during the 1960s and 1970s. Those papers, he says, inspired him to come up with an alternative Big Bang hypothesis, which he submitted unsuccessfully to academic journals. He then tried posting his articles on the arXiv preprint server — a non-peer-reviewed website where physicists often post papers before submitting them to journals. When arXiv curators removed the papers and revoked his posting rights in 2001, Gentry complained, then filed the suit to regain access this August. "I'm a creationist and a believer in the Bible, but I want to know the truth. I want these papers to be tested by the scientific community," he says.

Paul Ginsparg, a professor at Cornell and creator of the site, declined to comment, citing the ongoing suit. But Nelson Roth, Cornell's associate counsel in charge of litigation, says that the rejection was based on Gentry's lack of academic affiliation, not his beliefs. "The religious views of the plaintiff are completely irrelevant," he says.

Even if the legal case makes no progress, it highlights some problems associated with websites whose content is not peer-reviewed, says Adrian Melott, a cosmologist at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. Melott, a co-founder of Kansas Citizens for Science, a group that has successfully lobbied against teaching creationism in the state's schools, says he's noticed a rise in "flaky" publications on the section of the arXiv server that he uses most. "We're coming to a crunch" over what can be published on open servers, he says.