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Explicit and Implicit Religion in *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek*

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ABSTRACT

It has often been proposed that the original series of *Star Trek* reflected a modern, enlightenment perspective on religion, and that subsequent spin-offs like *Deep Space Nine* moved in a more post-modern direction. *Doctor Who*, the longest running science fiction show, provides an interesting basis for comparison. Both television shows offer similar tropes, and in both instances, the rhetoric that claims to explain away religion in scientific terms ends up treating it as literally true. Both shows depict our universe as populated with “natural gods” which are sometimes explicitly identified with the gods and demons of ancient human religious literature.

Keywords

Star Trek, *Doctor Who*, Gods, supernatural, myths, Clarke’s Third Law, science fiction, aliens

It has been suggested that *Star Trek* can usefully serve as a cultural barometer, providing an illustration of cultural shifts and changing views of religion as they unfold over the course of this relatively continuous sci-fi phenomenon. From its inception in the 1960s in the original series, through follow-ups in the form of *The Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine*, *Voyager* and *Enterprise*, and through multiple motion pictures including the recent “reboot” that both returned to and reinvented the characters and universe of the original series, some scholars of religion have found *Star Trek* to usefully illustrate, through its evolving and changing depictions of spirituality, the shift from modernity to postmodernity (Grenz 1996, 1–10). Whereas the crew of the original series served on a ship with no clergy

and no explicit practice of religion, by the time we reach *Deep Space Nine*, members of Starfleet stationed there found themselves in a world of religious pluralism, and were themselves invited to try out (or even become the emissary of) these “alternative” spiritualities.

Presumably one may turn to the longest running science fiction show in history, *Doctor Who*, with a similar aim in mind. Although it experienced a long hiatus in the 90s and the first part of the new millennium, nevertheless *Doctor Who* remains a single ongoing series with a central character whose story, background, and technology have remained largely continuous. For this reason, *Doctor Who* ought to serve every bit as well as *Star Trek* as a barometer for cultural changes related to religion—if not better. And being produced on the other side of the Atlantic, in the UK, it provides readings for a slightly different cultural climate over roughly the same time period. In fact, the comparison we offer here between the two series will suggest that fluctuations in the depiction of religion on science fiction television programs are due to multiple factors and forces, and do not correlate in a simple fashion to cultural shifts.

Star Trek

When considering the view of religion on *Star Trek*, in particular in light of the views expressed by Gene Roddenberry, the show’s creator, many have understood its vision to be a-religious if not indeed anti-religious (McGrath 2016). The Enterprise is a vessel with impressive military capability, and even if its mission is in theory a peaceful exploratory one most of the time, scarcely an episode passes in which at least one member of the Enterprise security crew, dressed in a red shirt, does not meet his demise. When that happens, no chaplain is called, because the ship has no chaplain. But perhaps even more striking than that, no one on the Enterprise seems to do or have much if anything that indicates explicit religious faith. Of course, Lt. Uhura’s famous closing line to “Bread and Circuses” (1968)—indicating that the worshippers on a planet parallel to Earth were devotees not of the *sun* in the sky, but the *Son* of God—suggests an intimate acquaintance on her part with Christianity. But such references to explicit religion are few and far between—or at least, so it is often claimed (Lamp 1999, 196–205).

The lack of clergy and apparent lack of explicit religiosity aboard the Enterprise is, however, only one side of the story. In fact, for a show that supposedly eschewed religious interest, discourse about God turned up from its debut: it is there in the very first episode of *Star Trek* ever to

appear on television, “Where No Man Has Gone Before” (1966). In that episode, the Enterprise seeks to cross the outer threshold of the galaxy—a symbolic expression of human ability to harness technology in the interest of transcending our present experience. In crossing the boundary, a couple of crew members who rank high in *psi* ability are affected, and begin to be transformed into powerful god-like beings. Captain Kirk’s friend Gary Mitchell quickly becomes capable of willing a barren desert world into a garden paradise, and comes to view human beings of the sort that he used to be as unimportant entities to be crushed if they annoy him. The comparison with gods is not left implicit: Kirk himself addresses the subject of what the appropriate attributes of a god are. *Star Trek* had a “theological” component to its discourse, and it was present from the very first episode to air.

This is not a unique occurrence. If we fast forward more than two decades to the movie *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier* (1989), the idea for which began with a script by William Shatner, we find the Enterprise and its crew on a search for God. Admittedly, the ship and crew have been hijacked for that purpose by Spock’s half-brother. But it is a search for God and for Eden nevertheless. What’s more, there are striking parallels and contrasts to the episode “Where No Man Has Gone Before” discussed above. Both have titles drawn from the show’s opening monologue. The episode features the ship pioneering beyond the edge of the universe and discovering the possibilities and risks of humans becoming gods through the unlocking of inner potential. The movie features an attempt to travel into the galactic centre, and an arguably false god who is in fact a dangerous entity seeking to manipulate people for its own ends. Towards the end of the movie, Kirk talks about God being in the human heart. Despite Roddenberry’s expressed desire that the future of humanity be essentially atheistic, even in the episodes and films in which he was directly involved, the quest for God is depicted, with varying results.

The reference to *psi* energy in “Where No Man Has Gone Before” indicates an important element of science fiction from the period of the original series. It is found in both *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who*, and it contrasts with the viewpoint that has come to dominate in the realm of the natural sciences since these shows began. In both shows, it is taken for granted at times that there is such a thing as the soul and that seemingly supernatural or magical capacities will be found to really be part of human nature and human experience. They will be given a scientific explanation, to be sure, but they turn out to be real nonetheless. And in some instances, science and technology do not merely explain but enhance these latent human

abilities, with the potential to make us increasingly like gods—if only what Freud described as “prosthetic gods,” divine if and when we have the needed technological assistance. This calls to mind what is known as “Clarke’s Third Law” after Arthur C. Clarke who coined it: “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.”

We see this view of technology—and the potential for technology to be misidentified as miracle by the uncomprehending—in a piece of dialogue from the famous *Star Trek* episode “Bread and Circuses” (1968), in which Dr McCoy expresses the wish that he could just once beam down to a planet and say, “Behold, I am the archangel Gabriel.” In the *Star Trek* universe, it is not impossible that someone could shimmer into existence in front of you and utter the words “Behold, I am the archangel Gabriel.” It is simply that there would be a scientific/technological explanation for it. There is a replacement of magic with modern technology, but in a manner that seems at the same time to also undermine the distinction in some respects. If this is in accordance with Clarke’s law, it blurs the very categories of “science/technology” and “magic/religion,” which some have felt to be at the heart of the allegedly secular outlook of much science fiction (Kovacs 2015, 206). And thus, as studies of implicit religion have often highlighted, even in the absence of traditional religious institutions or terminology, and against the backdrop of a move in a secular and/or scientific direction, one finds that the result is not an elimination of everything that can be considered religious, but quite the contrary (Common 2014). In many instances, there is a significant amount of continuity, as the same basic aspects of human life in the cosmos, and the same existential questions, find expression within this altered framework.

Doctor Who

The early episodes of *Doctor Who* reflect an outlook that offers striking similarities to and differences from *Star Trek* in the same period. *Doctor Who* neither avoided traditional religion, nor treated it with overt condescension, to precisely the same extent as *Star Trek*’s original series. *Doctor Who* began with an air as much of the mystical as the scientific. If one had replaced the grouchy old alien man with a kindly old wizard, and the TARDIS (his craft that allows him and his companions to travel through time and space), with a magical box, the same story could have been told. And this, of course, is not unique to *Doctor Who*. *Star Wars*, with its wise wizard Obi-Wan Kenobi and Lord Vader’s “sorcerer’s ways,” also transgresses boundaries that are often posited between science fiction and

fantasy. This should come as no surprise: a great deal of science fiction is characterized, not by *realistic* science, but by the attribution to science of things that it may never be able to accomplish.

Unlike *Star Trek*, discussion of such theological questions as the attributes of gods are absent from the first episode of *Doctor Who*. Yet by taking the Doctor, his granddaughter Susan, and their accidental companions Ian Chesterton and Barbara Wright back into humanity's Stone Age existence, the show made a similar point in a different and more subtle manner. If the universe's surprising phenomena at the extreme limits of the galaxy have the ability to transform humans into gods, in the first stories of *Doctor Who*, Ian's incredulousness when faced with the Doctor's more advanced technology is quickly juxtaposed with a primitive humanity that finds current human technology—the ease with which we make fire using matches—equally unbelievable. The message of this juxtaposition is surely more than simply a paraphrase of Clarke's Law, that “any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.” It also emphasizes the importance of perspective, and the possibility that what “seems like magic” will change over a species' history. *Doctor Who* has seemed at times to hold out the hope that science can provide us with transcendence—of space, time, and all dimensions of existence. In providing an imaginary technology that can provide provisions and meet needs easily and without any apparent cost, for instance, *Doctor Who* might initially have appeared to adopt an optimistic view of the future of technology akin to that of *Star Trek*.

Yet *Doctor Who* has regularly offered a counterbalancing technological pessimism—or at least ineptitude—that was different from *Star Trek*, and it did so from the very first season. While Scotty would regularly say things like “I cannae change the laws of physics, Captain!,” he and other Starfleet engineers regularly seemed to have been able to adapt their seemingly miraculous technologies to accomplish even more than they were designed to do. The Doctor, on the other hand, has always struggled to get his TARDIS to work as he intended it to. It regularly lands him in surprising and unintended places, and in the third episode of the very first season in the show's history, the ship managed to strike terror into the hearts of all the show's characters—as the result of a stuck button on the control console. On *Doctor Who*, it was rarely advanced technology that saved the day, but sharp wits and craftiness, whereas malfunctioning technology was often the reason the characters found themselves in the mess they did in the first place.

The fourth episode in the first season was the first that featured the travellers intersecting with famous historical figures and events from

human history: “Marco Polo” (1964). Confronted with the notion that the TARDIS is a “flying caravan,” Marco Polo responded by asking whether the travellers were of the Buddhist faith. He claimed to have seen—even though he did not understand—feats of levitation accomplished by Buddhist monks. Here too, the potential for advanced technology to be mistaken for the supernatural is a key idea, even if one that is not given a great deal of attention in the episode. Buddhism was in fact the first explicit religion to get an explicit mention on the series, and several later episodes would incorporate or touch on Buddhist elements and themes, if not always as blatantly or directly.

Another early episode in which explicit religion featured prominently was “The Aztecs” (1964), in which Barbara was mistaken for a goddess. When she decided to try to use her newfound divine status to combat the practice of human sacrifice, and to persuade the people that the rains will come and eclipses will end even without such measures, the Doctor tried to dissuade her. His words intimated that this would be inappropriate simply because “it is their religion,” but he was even more emphatic that any attempt to rewrite history was an exercise in futility. This, of course, is one of the paradoxes of time travel stories, since it would seem that by their very presence, time travellers are changing history in at least some small degree. However, the Doctor’s concern may have been neither an ethical nor a philosophical one, but a practical one: it is indeed possible to make a difference in the lives of individuals, but societies are on trajectories from which they are not so easily diverted. The Doctor’s view of history and the possibility of changing it comes to the fore time and again, and the case could be made that the Doctor’s belief in the inalterability of at least some moments is implicitly religious, involving something akin to the view of history as guided by providence or divinely ordained.

In “The Massacre of St. Bartholomew’s Eve” (1966) in the third season, the Doctor and his companion Steven landed in the midst of France at a time when tensions between Protestants and Catholics were at a peak. The Doctor was interested in talking to famous scientist Charles Preslin, an apothecary ahead of his time in blaming disease on germs. When the man was reluctant to speak because he feared the church would prosecute him for heresy, the Doctor was remarkably understanding of the Abbot of Amboise’s suspiciousness in that historical setting: “Yes, I suppose just now all churchmen are rather suspicious of your work. But surely you can carry on without his knowledge, hmm?” Although at times in later seasons the Doctor aligns himself squarely on the side of science as opposed to

faith, such moments only arise when the matter at hand is indeed a choice between reason or science and superstition. The question of whether the Doctor has any explicit religious views of his own is not one that the show has directly answered thus far.

The examples given above are but a few samples of the sorts of ways religion came up in the time of the original Doctor, played by William Hartnell. As fans of the show know well, the Doctor turned out to have the ability to regenerate, to remain the same person and yet survive death through a renewal process that changes his appearance and at least somewhat modifies his personality. This serves well as a metaphor for the ways in which the show itself has “regenerated” and reinvented itself over the course of its history, and both sorts of regeneration are surely key factors contributing to its longevity. No television series, it could be argued, survives for decades without the need to reinvent itself or explore new territory—even if the shows themselves are all about the exploration of “strange new worlds.”

If we fast forward to the era of the third Doctor, played by Jon Pertwee, the episode “The Dæmons” (1971) depicts the Doctor as scoffing at claims about the occult. Yet in an important bit of dialogue, he emphasized to a self-proclaimed “white witch” who claimed to have seen the devil that he was not disputing her truthfulness or her perception but her *interpretation* of what she had seen:

YATES: Did you say the Devil?

HAWTHORNE: Yes, dear boy. Satan, Lucifer, the Prince of Darkness, Beelzebub, the Horned Beast. Call him what you like, he was there.

DOCTOR: You saw the Devil?

HAWTHORNE: Yes.

DOCTOR: And what did he look like?

HAWTHORNE: Well, it was a glimpse, no more. Twenty, thirty feet high, but the horns were there, and that face.

JO: The Devil?

DOCTOR: Look, Miss Hawthorne, I agreed with you from the first about the danger, but now I think you’re utterly mistaken. Whatever else you saw it certainly was not the Devil.

HAWTHORNE: But it was! There’s a Satanist cult in this village and last night they held a sabbat.

YATES: A sabbat?

HAWTHORNE: Yes, an occult ceremony to call up the Devil.

JO: And it worked! The Devil came!

DOCTOR: Nonsense, Jo.

Horned gods or demons, the Doctor insisted, were in fact aliens, Dæmons from the planet Damos.¹

During the 1970s, as Jon Pertwee and then Tom Baker depicted the Doctor, many key elements of the treatment of religion that are associated with *Star Trek* became increasingly characteristic. The Doctor encountered people who worshiped a god that was really a computer, and people in humanity's past were said to have mistaken aliens for gods.²

But this was not entirely new. In the episode "The Myth Makers" (1965) from the show's third season, the Doctor's sudden appearance in ancient Troy resulted in his being mistaken for Zeus by Achilles (and eventually giving the Greeks the idea to make a giant horse and hide inside it, the Doctor having previously dismissed the historicity of that very occurrence as unlikely). This episode first aired in October and November 1965. The *Star Trek* episode "Who Mourns for Adonais?," which explored similar territory, aired in September 1967. And so, although the creative manner in which *Star Trek* explored the idea of an alien explanation for ancient Greek religion may be more familiar to many readers, it was neither prior to, nor the inspiration of, this *Doctor Who* episode, which in a sense actually depicted what Captain Kirk would only later propose to have been the case.

If we focus in on the supposedly sceptical outlook of *Star Trek* and (to a lesser extent) *Doctor Who* in these episodes, and compare it with that adopted in the secular, academic study of religion, the contrast is striking. Far from doubting the myths of ancient Greece, both shows envisage those who told the stories as perhaps being entirely truthful and accurate. This doesn't seem to be aptly described as *scepticism* of religion. Science fiction has found it worthwhile, time and time again, to explore scenarios in which ancient gods literally existed, as misidentified aliens from other planets. This involves a demotion or at least a reinterpretation of their status, to be sure, but it is not offering an argument against their existence, as one might expect in television shows reflecting a purely secular outlook.

In the Tom Baker era of *Doctor Who*, there are several more instances of encounters between species where one treats the others as gods, frequently

1. On this episode see also Sullivan 2012.

2. See e.g. "The Daemons," "The Time Monster," and "The Face of Evil."

without humans or Earth being involved. One particularly important episode, featuring religion among a people depicted as primitive, is “The Face of Evil” (1977)—which initially had the working title “The Day God Went Mad.” In the Peter Davison era, such thematic elements about religion arising from misunderstood contact with aliens and advanced technology continued, in episodes such as “Planet of Fire” (1984), in which an alien volcanologist in a thermal suit was interpreted as being a god.

The outlook on explicit religion in these episodes could seem to be a largely negative one. But as an analysis in terms of implicit religion would lead one to expect, the treatment of this theme on both shows is not easily reduced to a dichotomy which forces a choice between the secular or scientific vs. the sacred. And so, having offered a very brief and merely illustrative survey of some of the ways in which religion has been explored on both *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who* from their early days onward, let me focus in the remainder of this article on one particular aspect, illustrated well by an apparent tension in the *Doctor Who* episode “The Dæmons” which I have already mentioned.

Like the Starfleet crew in several *Star Trek* episodes in the Original Series, the Doctor adopted a disdainful and condescending view of those simple-minded people who believed in magic and gods rather than science. Yet the episode also depicts the Doctor as acknowledging that those ancient peoples who mentioned some sort of horned deity or demon were in fact accurately describing what they experienced. The fact that such powerful beings were “aliens”—extra-terrestrial beings—does not seem to change the fact that, on a very important level, those ancients are viewed, not as delusional, but as having been literally correct. And so, in the very attempt to replace superstition with science, science fiction very often finds itself affirming those traditional supernatural beliefs at the same time, albeit in new ways.

Let me provide two concrete examples in the dialogue from this episode. The first involves a conversation between the Doctor and his assistant, Jo Grant:

DOCTOR: ...Everything that happens in life must have a scientific explanation. If you know where to look for it, that is...

JO: Yes, but suppose something was to happen and nobody knew the explanation. Well, nobody in the world, in the universe. Well, that would be magic, wouldn't it?

DOCTOR: You know, Jo, for a reasonably intelligent young lady, you do have the most absurd ideas.

The second includes, in addition to the Doctor and Jo, Miss Hawthorne, the self-proclaimed white witch, and Sgt Benton of UNIT, the United Nations Intelligence Taskforce:

DOCTOR: Come on, Jo, stir your stumps. Now then. All right? Now then, tell me. Who's that? [A papyrus image of a ram's head with the solar disc between its horns]

JO: An Egyptian god, isn't it?

DOCTOR: Top of the class, Jo, top of the class. That's right, that's the Egyptian god Khnum, with horns. There's another one, a Hindu demon.

ALL: With horns.

DOCTOR: Oh. Thank you very much. And our old friend the Horned Beast.

HAWTHORNE: Oh, you could go on all day and all night showing us pretty pictures. I mean, horns have been a symbol of power ever since—

DOCTOR: Ever since man began? Exactly. But why? [...] Now creatures like those have been seen over and over again throughout the history of man, and man has turned them into myths, gods or devils, but they're neither. They are, in fact, creatures from another world.

BENTON: Do you mean like the Axons and the Cybermen?

DOCTOR: Precisely, only far, far older and immeasurably more dangerous.

JO: And they came here in spaceships like that tiny one up at the barrow?

DOCTOR: That's right. They're Daemons from the planet Daemos, which is?

JO: Sixty thousand light years away on the other side of the galaxy.

DOCTOR: And they first came to Earth nearly one hundred thousand years ago.

While this might seem to reflect a consistent view of both religion and superstition as outmoded foolishness, and science as its ideal enlightened replacement, in fact a closer inspection reveals a much greater ambiguity. After all, those who reported what they saw, and recognized the danger in it, were apparently absolutely right, and truthfully reported their experiences. And so the Doctor's scientific dismissiveness rings somewhat hollow. He may have a superior amount of knowledge and understanding about the Daemons, but the religious and other such viewpoints do not ultimately turn out to be far off the mark in their perception. And so, as has often been observed by those investigating implicit religion, the stance even of the anti-religious often includes elements that may be considered

religious in an important sense (Riley 2010, 269–270; Craig 2012, 28). The introduction of a secular-scientific framework results in the transformation of religion rather than its elimination.

This same ambiguity about the reality or falsity of religion comes to the fore in recent episodes as well, such as when the Doctor, based on his multifaceted and extensive experience, affirms solemnly in the episode “Night Terrors” (2011) that “monsters are real.” This aspect of *Doctor Who* gets at the heart of an apparent tension within science fiction. Science fiction is usually distinguished from fantasy—sometimes emphatically by fans who appreciate one but not the other. Yet at the same time, it features much the same miracles, the same wizardry, and the same creatures, only explained in a different way. The reality seems to be that, far from combatting traditional stories of the fantastic with science, science fiction in fact allows those stories to be updated for a scientific era, while retaining many of their key features intact.

We see this even in the Doctor himself, and not only in horned alien demons and the like. The Doctor evolves over the course of the show’s history into something of a saviour figure—not an omnipotent or unflawed one, to be sure, but a god-like figure nonetheless, a Time Lord, akin to a deity who has dominion over one particular domain. His “sovereignty” over history is not at all absolute, as we have seen. But this has always been true of lesser deities. During David Tennant’s era (2005–2010), the Doctor gets referred to explicitly as “a lonely god” by a mysterious near-immortal like himself.³ While science fiction is regularly felt to be opposed to the God or gods of explicit religion, it regularly introduces powerful godlike entities. Sometimes the quasi-religious status of such beings is left implicit, while at others it is unambiguous. The latter instances have sometimes generated debates about whether science fiction is opposed to religion, or is becoming a religion itself.

Be that as it may, even as the Doctor’s godlike characteristics had been coming increasingly to the fore in recent episodes, the writers and producers saw fit to deflate him somewhat. In the episode “The God Complex” (2011) the Doctor gave voice to his assumption that it was his responsibility to save everyone from the dilemma in which they found themselves. In response, a Muslim character (a rarity on the show) tells the Doctor that “that’s quite the God complex you’ve got.” The remainder of the episode focuses on the Doctor’s realization that he needs to *undermine* the

3. His nickname in school, we are told at one point, was “Theta Sigma,” which in Greek Christian texts served as an abbreviation for *theos*, “God.”

absolute faith that his travelling companion, Amy Pond, has in him. The episode highlights the non-ultimacy of the Doctor in other ways as well, for instance when he is asked, “What do Time Lords pray to?”

Throughout the history of *Star Trek*, there have been godlike beings from advanced civilizations, stretching from the Squire of Gothos in the original series to Q throughout several of the sequels. The crew of the Enterprise have been mistaken for gods more than once, and the same scenario has recurred throughout the history of the sequels. Even *Deep Space Nine*, often felt to represent the epitome of a postmodern pluralistic viewpoint (McAvan 2012, 59–60), and as such something of a departure from Gene Roddenberry’s original vision, depicts the gods of the Bajorans as in fact transdimensional beings living in a wormhole. If religious elements are explored, this is not a departure from the show’s earlier and even *earliest* history. And even where religious components are integrated into the show, it is not without offering some sort of scientific framework for viewing the entities in question as “natural gods,” and the related phenomena as science rather than miracle. But as we have emphasized in this article, in practice there is not necessarily a *visible* distinction between the two categories, only a theoretical one.

Both shows express disdain for superstition, for the interpretation of more advanced technology in what are considered to be fundamentally irrational terms. The classic “enlightened” scientific view of things, which views superstition and belief in the supernatural with disdain, continues throughout the various *Star Trek* shows, running counter to the claim that *Star Trek* evolves towards a postmodern view of religion, truth, and pluralism (Grenz 1996, 1–9). This is not to say that the show does not have moments which lean in that direction. But they appear to have always been there, co-existing side by side with the view that everything ultimately has a scientific explanation, even if that explanation is not known (and in some cases is unlikely to turn out to be realistic or feasible).

Conclusion

The examples provided above illustrate the complexities that a single series can create over the course of multiple decades. But rather than it being a case of linear development, as has sometimes been posited with respect to *Star Trek*, it is more accurate to say that both these science fiction series—like the scriptural canons of some explicit religions—involve multiple authors, and thus a diversity of perspectives framed within a broad tradition which does not conform consistently to a single unidirectional

trajectory. And so, while there are trends which can be traced over the course of time (which may on occasion parallel cultural shifts), in all canons, any attempt to flatten the diversity through harmonization, or make facile dichotomies between Old and New Testaments (or original series vs. *Deep Space Nine*, or old vs. new *Doctor Who*), or posit a linear evolutionary trajectory, all at the end of the day seem simplistic and inadequate, at least when taken on their own.

Science fiction has always had room for “natural gods”: powerful but not all-powerful, wise but not infallible entities that populate the universe and might just intersect with the realm of human beings. This shouldn’t surprise us. These stories are our own scientific age’s way of telling stories that imaginatively explore our place in the cosmos, our quest for transcendence, the mysteries of life, and the question of whether we are alone. Religious and mythological stories from days gone by, and science fiction stories from the present day, typically assume that the answer to that question is “no.” And the very attempt to explore these themes and topics through the medium of science fiction scenarios tells us something important about implicit religion. Even in a supposedly secular age, in a genre that is perhaps associated more closely with secularism than any other, old stories about gods and demons and monsters, about magic and miracle, are not being replaced so much as transformed and *preserved* within a new framework. Even as our understanding of the cosmos has been dramatically transformed by advances in the natural sciences, we continue to tell stories involving powerful entities in or from a realm far above us, as we explore many of the same fundamental questions that we always have.

For those of us involved in the academic study of religion, the intersection of religion and science fiction—including but not limited to *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who*—provides a fascinating terrain for exploring the way in which we human beings seek to make sense of our existence: the mythmaking process, rather than withering under the powerful gaze of science, continues unabated, in new and sometimes surprising forms. Given that science fiction provides one major arena for the re-expression of classic mythemes and theological viewpoints within the framework of a supposedly scientific era, the treatment of religious subjects on *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek* is interesting for all the reasons that *any* religious phenomena—whether explicit or implicit—are interesting to scholars of religion: because they are there, and give expression to an array of human attempts to articulate their beliefs, commitments, worldviews, hopes, and ultimate concerns, using the medium of stories of the fantastic as a means of doing so.

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