Star Trek - An Introduction

Religion in Classic Star Trek
Introduction to Star Trek

Created by Gene Roddenberry

Agnostic (or Secular) Humanist

Five Star Trek series to date - Star Trek (Classic, or TOS), Star Trek: The Next Generation (TNG), Star Trek: Deep Space Nine (DS9), Star Trek: Voyager (VOY), Star Trek: Enterprise (ENT)

Twelve Star Trek films to date, STXII released May 2013

47 years and counting…
Classic Star Trek

- 1966-1969
- Originally cancelled after 2 seasons, returned for 3rd season due to letter writing campaign by fans
- “Earth-Shattering” in that it challenged gender norms, racism, sexism, nationalism, etc.
- Presented a vision of the future without war, poverty, crime, most diseases, prejudice, etc…
- Religion vs Individualism
Star Trek: The Next Generation

• 1987-1994
• Gene Roddenberry had complete creative control in early seasons - very much a vehicle for his philosophy
• Religion vs Science and Reason
Star Trek: Deep Space Nine

• 1993-2000
• Roddenberry no longer at the helm
• 1st Star Trek series not set on spaceship (on space station instead)
• Religion dominant theme - mixed messages - personal faith good, clergy bad (mostly), Star Fleet = secular
Star Trek: Voyager

- 1995-2002
- Several Star Trek firsts - first female captain, first ever human being shown to be religious - 2nd in command, Commander Chakotay
- Native American Spirituality = good
Star Trek Enterprise

- 2001-2005
- A “Prequel” series, set before the time period of Classic Trek
- Retro feel to technology, etc.
- First Star Trek series to be cancelled since original series
- Religion = terrorism?
- Religious Institutions = corrupt?
- “Back to the Bible” mentality?
False gods - Computer as god

• Fear of technology - the control of mankind by machine - very ‘60's
• Fear of communism - threat to individual self-autonomy
• Fear of Institutional Control (Church, State)
• Are these fears still dominant in today’s world?
• What issues surrounding technology and religion are of key concern today?
False gods -
Computer as god

- Episode: “The Apple” (1967)
- How is “paradise” depicted?
- What biblical story does the episode reference?
- What main issue is debated (between McCoy and Spock)?
- What is the nature of “evil” in this episode?
- What is “good”?
- What messages does this episode try to communicate about religion?
  - Religion makes slaves out of humans?
  - Service to false gods limits human potential?
  - Change as human imperative? Religion stifles human progress?
  - Religion stifles human sexual expression?
False gods - Computer as god

• Episode: “The Return of the Archons (1967)
• Religion = Church hierarchy
• Church = Oppressive
• Religion equals brainwashing
• Religious people = brainwashed hypocrites
• Religion equals cultural stagnation
False gods -
Computer as god

• Episode: “For the World is Hollow, and I have Touched the Sky” (1968)
• Religion as immature - religious believers as children
• Religion as coercive
• Religion as deceptive
• Religion as destructive and life-threatening
False gods - Aliens/Humans as god

• **Aliens/Humans as God:** Fear of despotism and loss of individual freedoms; surrender of rational self-will to irrational obedience and supernaturalism - Religion/Individualism opposition - fear of “cults,” “brainwashing/mindcontrol”
• What issues arise today in connection to individualism and new religions (if any)?
False gods - Humans as god

- Episode: “Where No Man has Gone Before” (1966)
  - Absolute power corrupts absolutely
  - Moral evolution must go hand in hand with physical and mental evolution
  - No single individual can be trusted with “divine” power
False gods - Humans as god

• Episode: “The Paradise Syndrome (1968)
  • Religion as self-deception
  • Religion as “primitive”
• Science/Technology as true savior
False gods – Aliens as god

• **Episode**: “Who Mourns for Adonais?”
• “Ancient Astronaut” theory of religion
• Supernatural power really just technology in disguise (all religious miracle workers are frauds?)
• Religion out-dated and destined to be outgrown.
False gods - Aliens as god

• **Film**: Star Trek:V The Final Frontier (1989)
  • Religious followers deluded
  • Religious promises false
  • God as charlatan
False gods - Aliens with godlike powers

- Episodes: “Errand of Mercy” (1967); “The Squire of Gothos” (1967); “The Gamesters of Triskelion” (1968); “Plato’s Stepchildren” (1968); “The Menagerie” Pts 1 & 2 (1967)
- Pop-culture evolution - all species will evolve into god-like beings one day (secular thesis of divinity?)
- God-like power does not equal moral virtue (morality is separate from religion/religious power)
Religious Themes in Classic Trek

• Redemption through suffering, sacrifice, death
• Episodes: “The Empath” (1968);
Religious Themes in classic Trek Films

• Death, Sacrifice, Resurrection
• Souls, rebirth, love
Religious Themes in Classic Trek Films

- Spiritual Quest