Star Trek and Religion:

Changing attitudes towards religion in Voyager and DS9
Star Trek: Deep Space Nine

- Differences between DS9 and other Trek series:
  - Takes place on space station (repeated contact with different species, not just per-episode contact... deeper cultural understanding?)
  - Religion central to premise, multiple episodes
  - Regular worship events featured: prayers, temple attendance, meditation, religious hierarchy, etc.
Star Trek: Deep Space Nine

• Does DS9 as a series respect religion? What factors might indicate that it does respect religion? What factors might indicate it does not?

Were we more open to the spiritual in the late 1990’s then we were in the 1980's (or 1960's), or less so?

Is “respect” another way of saying “patronizing rejection”? 
Star Trek: Deep Space Nine

- Sisko’s “divine parentage”: revealed in Season Seven, Sisko’s mother was human, possessed by Bajoran Prophet
  - Mother left after Sisko born - mission accomplished!
  - Sisko is therefore sort-of, in a sci-fi way, of divine parentage - brought to life deliberately by beings worshipped as Gods.
  - First time ever “gods” are shown to act outside the species to whom they are sacred

- What does this say about Star Trek: DS9’s treatment of the divine? Is this a more sympathetic treatment than Classic Trek or Next Gen?
Star Trek: Deep Space Nine

• Sisko’s Journey
  – Identified as the Emissary by spiritual leader of Bajor in pilot episode (“Emissary” 1993)
  – Religious role accepted reluctantly, but only as subordinate to Starfleet secular way of understanding (“Destiny” 1995; “Accession” 1996)
  – Truly accepts his religious role in fifth season - (“Rapture” 1997)
Star Trek: Deep Space Nine

• Sisko’s Journey, con’t
  – Starfleet role and Emissary role come into conflict in sixth season - Sisko chooses Starfleet role, and disaster follows (“Tears of the Prophets” 1998)
  – Season seven (final season) - Sisko follows spiritual path, fulfils destiny - religious journey compete. (‘Image in the Sand” 1999; “What you leave behind” 1999)
  – Comes to wife Kassidy in a vision - has now transcended physical limits, linear time…
Star Trek: Deep Space Nine

- Apotheosis - ascending to godhood.
- Multiple interpretations possible (but mine is the right one!!)
- Did Sisko die? Is he living bodily in Celestial Temple? What “more” do the Prophets have for Sisko to do?
- Is Sisko a “god”? A prophet? A servant of the prophets?
Star Trek: Deep Space Nine

- The Conversion of Kassidy
  - Kassidy is Sisko’s wife, married against Prophet’s advice
  - Represents secular Starfleet view
  - Refuses to accept Sisko as Emissary until pregnant, then converts to religious view
  - When Kassidy comes to accept Sisko as Emissary, viewing audience does also?
  - Recipient of vision of Sisko
Star Trek: Deep Space Nine

- Sisko’s religious journey has New Age elements:
  - monistic (“for one moment I glimpsed it all, the pattern that held it all together...”)
  - purposeful (“I’m their emissary, and they are not finished with me yet...”)
  - individualistic - Sisko’s religious journey is his own - others need not follow same path in order to have genuine religious experiences (i.e. Klingons, other Bajorans, Vulcans...)
  - evolutionary - Sisko is “evolving” into something god-like - other humans can/will follow suit
  - Millenial - cosmic battle of good/evil - good wins
Star Trek: Voyager

- Number of Star Trek firsts: first female captain; inversion of previous gender norms (TNG vs VOY); first female engineer
- 1st time human being shown to be religious
- 1st native American character
- Native American Spirituality as a model for religion
Star Trek: Voyager

- Native American spirituality in Voyager
  - Spirit guides
  - Vision quests
  - Soul travel
  - Healing rituals
  - Environmental concerns
Star Trek: Voyager

• False God theme revisited - “Sky gods” = aliens…
  – Sympathetic approach
  – Integration of science and spirituality?
  – New age connection…
  – Episode “Tattoo” 1996
Star Trek: Voyager

- New Age Elements in Voyager:
  - rationality (in accord with science, empirical)
  - pluralism/eclecticism (many paths)
  - humanism (spirituality located in human potential - evolutionary)
  - individualism (each individual defines reality for themselves)
Star Trek: Voyager

Religion/Science - is faith in Science “religious”?  
Episode: “Sacred Ground”  
- Leap of Faith  
- Non-rational  
- Construct own reality
Star Trek: Voyager

- Do religion and science have to be opposed?
- Can Science provide access to spiritual experiences?
- Episode: “Omega Directive”
Star Trek: Enterprise

• Episode “Chosen Realm” - religious fanatics as terrorists, religious motivation = no win situation?
Star Trek: Enterprise

- Protestant, Christian-informed view of religion
  - Back to the “bible” (Kir’shara) emphasis
  - Personal experience
  - Revelation
  - Reformation of corrupt teachings
Star Trek and Religion

• How has Star Trek changed in its attitudes towards religion over the years?
• Does Star Trek reflect societal attitudes, or does it stand in opposition to them, when it comes to religion?
• Is Star Trek’s secular, rational worldview the norm for contemporary media? Contemporary society?
• Will we outgrow religion? Will we embrace the kind of rationalized, individualized religion Star Trek seems to advocate?