

Michael Jindra

IT'S ABOUT FAITH IN OUR FUTURE

Star Trek Fandom as Cultural Religion

From *The Wizard of Oz* to the *Davy Crockett* series of the 1950s, to movies such as *E.T.* and *Star Wars*, Americans in the twentieth century have been entertained and inspired by vivid and captivating narratives utilizing the new visual media. Through television and film, popular culture has become an influential, even dominating, force in many areas of our society. As the essays in this volume make clear, popular culture often draws upon religious themes, but in this essay I will argue that the entertainment industry also creates meanings that begin to function in religious ways for consumers of popular culture.

This should not be too surprising, for there has always been a relationship between religion and popular culture. Popular culture originally split from "learned," formal religious culture after the Protestant and Catholic Reformations,¹ but it continued to complement religious culture. The pre-Lenten Carnival was a direct product of church culture, as were the patron saint festivals and the cults of images of early modern Europe. Because of this close connection, popular culture was not a completely distinct alternative to religious culture.

Today, however, popular culture has lost its direct connection with the religious heart of society and has taken on a life of its own, creating its own stories and myths through which people find meaning and identity. Popular culture has become an independent producer of mythical narratives, a reflection of cultural themes and a producer of new ones. Though often using traditional religious themes and imagery (as in *E.T.*

or *Star Wars*), the narratives and messages have been formally cut off from the religious traditions that have dominated Western culture over the centuries. In other words, parts of popular culture have taken their place alongside the mainstream religious traditions and political ideologies which have guided people's lives down through the centuries.

There is no better example of this than the *Star Trek* fan phenomenon. As a television and movie production, *Star Trek* has gone through several installments, but the fan phenomenon it sparked has been going strong since the original *Star Trek* was first broadcast in 1966. The fan phenomenon first became apparent when the original *Star Trek* television series was threatened with cancellation after its second year. Fans immediately organized a letter-writing campaign to keep *Star Trek* on the air.² When it was canceled after its third year, the show went into syndication, which is when the "fandom"³ phenomenon really started to take off. The first *Star Trek* convention was in New York in 1972, and by then noncommercial *Star Trek* fan magazines ("fanzines") and commercial *Star Trek* books, manuals, and novels were being published for fans hungry for more knowledge about the *Star Trek* universe.

Efforts to revive *Star Trek* broadcasts, in some form, continued for years. An animated series was produced from 1973 to 1974, and in 1979 the first of nine (to date) *Star Trek* movies was released. In 1987, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* was first aired, and during its seven-year run this series was often the highest rated hour-long show among males 18 to 49 years of age, and a top-rated show among other viewer categories, including females. This success has led to still more spinoffs, including *Deep Space Nine* and *Voyager*.

No other popular culture phenomenon has shown the depth and breadth of fan activity that *Star Trek* has. The numbers are staggering: over 2 billion dollars in merchandise sold over the last 30 years; over 4 million novels sold every year (often bestsellers); several dictionaries of *Star Trek* alien languages, along with institutes that study them; "fanzines" numbering in the thousands; hundreds of fan clubs, conventions, online computer discussion groups, *Star Trek* role-playing and computer games, and now even entertainment centers and tourist sites; plus of course the endless reruns, broadcast in over 100 countries. Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock, the two main characters on the original series, became household names not only in the U.S. but in other English-speaking countries, along with the name of the spaceship they travel on, the *Enterprise*. Other popular culture productions, such as *Star Wars*, have

fascinated fans, but none have produced the level of fan involvement and activity that *Star Trek* has sustained for over 30 years.

STAR TREK AS A RELIGIOUS PHENOMENON?

When I undertook research on the fan phenomenon, my earliest intention was to focus on how *Star Trek* draws a picture of the future that is attractive to many Americans. Early on, however, I realized I was dealing with something much bigger and more complex than I had anticipated. As I will show in this essay, *Star Trek* is not limited to science fiction fans, nor is it just a pop culture phenomenon created for corporate profit.

Instead, *Star Trek* fandom seemed akin to a religious movement. It has features that parallel a religious movement: an origin myth, a set of beliefs, organizations, and some of the most active and creative members found anywhere. Fans fill out a mythological universe and keep it consistent through the formation of a "canon" of acceptable and unacceptable *Star Trek* events. Within fandom, there are also the schisms and oppositions that such movements typically engender. Finally, there is a stigma associated with *Star Trek* fans that is similar to that directed against serious devotees of other religions. To address *Star Trek* as a religious phenomenon, however, we first need to understand the place of religion in our society, how it is changing, and what it is changing into.

RELIGION IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN SOCIETY

Most Americans think of "religion" as a system of private, conscious, and articulated beliefs, usually expressed in churches and formal creeds, and set off from the other "spheres" of life such as work, politics, or leisure. This view of religion, however, stems from the specifically Western process of societal "differentiation,"⁴ in which institutional religion was given a specific function. After the medieval era, when religious practice was intimately connected to everyday life, the practice of Christianity became "abstracted," or disconnected from everyday life.⁵ As a result, we now tend to regard "religion" as something connected to institutions such as churches and denominations. Alternatively, we view it as something personal and private, a psychological aid that is only peripherally connected to a person's public life.

This view of religion severely limits our understanding of it. A less ethnocentric definition regards religion as the daily, lived expression of an individual's or a society's most important values.⁶ In many cultures, religion is not articulated as "belief," but is more often an ongoing experience, lived out and taken for granted.⁷ But we often fail to recognize religion in our own society when it lacks an institutional and creedal form, and is instead "disguised" under various political or cultural forms. The fact that nearly every group has a religious dimension is regarded as obvious in many parts of the world, but is foreign to us, and makes us blind to religious aspects in many areas of our lives.⁸

Since at least the nineteenth century, scholars such as August Comte have been predicting the imminent downfall of religion in society. Religion may now be more "segregated" into its own private sphere, but Christianity has remained a potent force. New forms of religion have also developed, many of which are individualistic and express belief in the power of humanity and our mastery over the environment, whether through science or quasi-scientific or mystical philosophies. These modern-day religions are expressed in many areas of our culture, including popular culture, as Bruce David Forbes makes clear in the introduction to this volume. "New age" groups, for example, favor smaller networks and reject large-scale organization, but have a commonality fostered by commercialization and expressed in popular culture. In this essay, I argue that *Star Trek* is also a primary location for the expression of contemporary religious impulses.

SOMETHING TO "BELIEVE" IN: THE WORLDVIEW OF STAR TREK

Star Trek is one of the most visible locations to witness religion in popular culture. Not only does it have an identifiable belief system and vision of the future, but the activities of its adherents are oriented toward participating in that vision and bringing it to fruition. *Star Trek* is a subset of the larger category of science fiction, which itself has been called a religion with a "central myth" of progress that "helps people live in or into the future." Science and technology are the vehicles by which this future will be brought into existence, "and should be understood in religious terms" as that which "breathes new life into humankind."⁹

The "positive view of the future" portrayed in *Star Trek* is one of the most common reasons fans give for their attraction to the show.¹⁰ On

Star Trek, problems such as poverty, war, and disease have been eliminated on earth, and threats are normally from alien forces. Faith is placed in the ability of humanity to solve its social and technical problems through application of reason, science, and technology.

Star Trek mixes the scientific and technical ideals of America with its egalitarian ideology, to produce a progressive world where people from all races work together in a vast endeavor to expand knowledge. One fan, recounting his first impressions of *Star Trek*, said: "We noticed people of various races, genders and planetary origins working together. Here was a future it did not hurt to imagine. Here was a constructive tomorrow for mankind, emphasizing exploration and expansion."¹¹

As a result, *Star Trek* has taken its place in American mythology alongside the "frontier" myth of westward expansion exemplified by television westerns. Essentially, *Star Trek* is a projection of America's expansionist past into the future, a continual quest for more knowledge, space, and resources. Anthropologist Conrad Kottak argues that *Star Trek* is "a summation of dominant American cultural themes . . . a transformation of a fundamental American origin myth," akin to a "secular myth" that emphasizes humanity's power to change the planet through science and technology.¹²

This utopianism can be traced back to notions of Christian eschatology that foresee, in the context of a linear history, a future perfection. Also tied in with utopian impulses is the Western notion of "order" out of which came the "project" of the West, that of universal assimilation.¹³ On the heels of these beliefs have come many utopian religious movements, and such political religions as orthodox Marxism. It is this culturewide ideological inclination towards future utopias that *Star Trek* fandom draws upon.¹⁴

The belief in progress and a "positive view of the future" was explicitly articulated by the late creator of *Star Trek*, Gene Roddenberry. In 1991, just months before he died, a 30-page interview with Roddenberry was published in *The Humanist*, the official magazine of the American Humanist Association, to which Roddenberry had belonged since 1986. There he reveals that he had a very conscious humanist philosophy that saw humans taking control of their own destiny, and thus able to control the future. Roddenberry's intention was to express his philosophy in *Star Trek*, but he had to keep this intention secret lest the network cancel his show.¹⁵

Others besides Roddenberry have used *Star Trek* to express their philosophy publicly. Jeffrey Mills has taught courses at various colleges on

“The Cultural Relevance of *Star Trek*.” He points to the Prime Directive (forbidding interference in another culture), the pluralistic Vulcan philosophy of IDIC (Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combination), and the cooperative governing structure of the United Federation of Planets as the kinds of ideas that we need to act on if we are to survive into the twenty-fourth century. By watching *Star Trek*, studying it, and applying its lessons, we can make the world a better place, Mills has written. “[I]n this light *Star Trek* almost becomes a sort of scripture, doesn’t it? What the Bible does in 66 books, *Star Trek* does in 79 episodes. . . . I can’t think of a series that really spoke to the future of humankind with as much clarity and vision as *Star Trek*.”¹⁶

In sum, *Star Trek* has strong affinities with a religious outlook, namely an underlying ideology and mythology that ties together messages about human nature and normative statements about social life with a construction and presentation of future society. Fans see *Star Trek* as a sign of hope for the future: not for personal salvation, but for the future of the collective “we,” our society, our species. It is a myth about where we have come and where we are going. “I” will not live until the twenty-fourth century, but “we” certainly will, according to the *Star Trek* future. Fans, through their participation in fan activities, have shown they want to be a part of forming that destiny.

THE FANDOM COMMUNITY

Star Trek as a religious phenomenon can be understood as a set of beliefs, but the activities of its fans give us a much fuller picture of its religious potential. *Star Trek* fandom is in part the culmination of a phenomenon that began in the post-World War I era, when science fiction pulp magazines had a small but loyal readership. From the beginning, science fiction fans formed a group set apart from the rest of society. These fans formed a community, at first exclusively male, but with females entering later: “fans married fans and raised their children to be fans; there are third- and even fourth-generation fans beginning to show up these days at the ‘cons’” [conventions].”¹⁷

It was out of science fiction fandom that the first *Star Trek* fans came. The story of the origin and growth of *Star Trek* fandom has itself taken on mythological proportions. A preview of the pilot episode of *Star Trek*, shown at a science fiction convention in 1966, is recounted almost in terms of a conversion experience:

“After the film was over we were unable to leave our seats. We just nodded at each other and smiled, and began to whisper.” “We came close to lifting the man [Roddenberry] upon our shoulders and carrying him out of the room. . . . [H]e smiled, and we returned the smile before we converged on him.”¹⁸

From then on, according to the author, the convention was divided into two factions: the “enlightened” who had seen the preview, and the “unenlightened” who had not.

Soon after *Star Trek* was first broadcast, fans formed organizations. *Star Trek* fan clubs have since grown into a diverse worldwide circuit of clubs, with over 500 clubs and chapters in nearly 20 countries. Many of these clubs are modeled after *Star Trek* ships, in a fan attempt at participation in the *Star Trek* universe. Hierarchy is established within each club by the titles given to leaders (Admiral, Captain, etc.). Members move up the hierarchy by being active in group events, much like in the Boy Scouts. Many fan clubs stress community service projects, which distinguishes them from a mere fan group and underlies the seriousness with which they take their beliefs about building a better world.

Star Trek fans often describe their fellow fans and clubs as a “family.” They celebrate personal milestones such as birthdays and anniversaries, and console each other over misfortunes. Many remark that they are closer to fellow fans than they are to their own family members. Fans often meet at the nearly 100 annual *Star Trek* conventions. One fan described a convention in the following way:

If you’ve never been to a convention, it’s an experience that is difficult to explain. It’s like being ushered into another world, where every facet of the day has something to do with STAR TREK. It might be seeing the incredible variety of merchandise in the dealers’ room or seeing a star of the series in person and having the opportunity to ask questions. To describe it as a time warp would not be far from wrong. You’re very much cut off from the real world in a convention. You can easily forget your own troubles as well as those of the world until the con ends and you have to come down to earth again.¹⁹

In other words, conventions are an opportunity to immerse oneself further in the *Star Trek* “experience,” much as one is immersed in ritual. Using the religious language of “immersion” is not just a rhetorical move on my part. Witness the following quote, a response to a questionnaire I sent out over the internet:

At a convention I went to a while back they had this thing about the “Temple of Trek.” I stayed and watched—even participated in the chanting. They had some woman who was there with her baby—fairly newborn. And they “baptized” the kid into this pseudo-church. Pretty bizarre—even though it

was all just a joke. But I must admit—I was kind of wondering at the time if everyone there was really taking it all as a joke.

This ambiguity over the seriousness of Trek practice reveals, I believe, its underlying religious potential.

Fan activities that seek to promote a family atmosphere are in a sense “symbolic communities” that resist the secularization and rationalization of modern life.²⁰ Yet there is a paradox here if we seek to apply this to *Star Trek* fandom, because the ideology expressed in *Star Trek* and adhered to by many of the fans is an expression of rationalistic modernism itself, the progressive belief that we can construct a better tomorrow. In other words, the modernism that is exemplified by *Star Trek* is, in the final analysis, itself a faith that is practiced in the various types of communities that make up *Star Trek* fandom.

STAR TREK TOURISM, PILGRIMAGE, AND PARTICIPATION

For fans, *Star Trek* exhibitions and tourist sites have become popular places where fans can see and experience the *Star Trek* universe up close. The Universal Studios theme park in California has a *Star Trek* set in which selected tourists are filmed, in full uniform, taking on characters’ roles and acting out a *Star Trek* plot. I visited one fan who proudly showed me the video of her visit there. The scenes of role-playing tourists were spliced with actual footage from one of the movies, giving the appearance that they were actually part of a *Star Trek* film. This fan described the experience “as a dream come true,” which made the 2,000-mile trip “worthwhile.” “We pilgrimage out there; it’s our Mecca,” she told me. Another fan showed me numerous pictures of herself posing in uniform on a mock-up of the *Enterprise* bridge that was built for a convention. It is the fan’s dream to actually be on the show, and the closest thing to it are bridge mock-ups and studio tours. The ritual act of sitting on the bridge in uniform and being photographed or filmed brings one into direct participation in the *Star Trek* universe.

Participation in the *Star Trek* universe is even more direct through “simming” (playing *Star Trek* simulations over the internet with other fans). These games allow fans to take a position as a crew member on a “ship” and role-play adventures with other fans. Fans move up through the ranks as they gain experience. As one player described it, simming

“allows anyone who embraces the precept of *Star Trek* and its premises of a bright future to be a part of that future,” by providing “their own unique interpretations of how the future might look or how far ‘we’ might evolve in our quest for knowledge and our thirst for exploration.”²¹

Finally, fans participate in the *Star Trek* universe by buying vast amounts of *Star Trek* merchandise and amassing videotaped collections of episodes and movies, a “capturing” of the *Star Trek* universe that enables fans to enter it at any time. Religion often points us to another world; *Star Trek* does the same.

LINKING THE STAR TREK UNIVERSE WITH THE PRESENT

The *Star Trek* universe is not a totally separate, fantastical universe unconnected to the present. In various ways, the *Star Trek* universe is “linked” with the contemporary world. The lead-in to every *Next Generation* episode (“Space: the final frontier. These are the voyages of the Starship *Enterprise* . . .”) begins with a close-up of the earth, and then a gradual “tour” through the other planets of the solar system, until the camera finally focuses on the *Enterprise*. This sequence orients the viewer to envision the events as taking place in his own universe.

Other “linkage” is accomplished by the *Star Trek* manuals and novels. *Star Trek Chronology: A History of the Future* compiles a history of the universe, incorporating both actual historical events and *Star Trek* history through the twenty-fourth century.²² This world is a direct projection from the present into the future. Furthermore, through time travel, many of the show’s plots actually take place in twentieth-century time. One fan I talked to focused on how space and time is manipulated in time travel plots, which allows one “a second chance . . . to set things right again.” Time travel allows us this ritualistic recourse, in much the same way healing rituals or rituals based on origin myths do. Origin myths often take place “in the beginning,” but are really a message for all time, a model to be attained, enacted through ritual.²³

Star Trek, like a religion, has profound effects on fans’ lives. Actors often relate how fans have been inspired by the show to do well in school and eventually become engineers, doctors, or scientists.²⁴ *Star Trek* has given people hope for the future, inspiring them to take control of their lives in the same way many self-help movements and quasi religions do.²⁵ Fans also want to make “real” life more like *Star Trek*. *Star Trek* fans have

been enthusiastic supporters of increased funding for the space program, and science fiction becomes science fact when “fans actively engineer events to make it true,”²⁶ such as by naming the first space shuttle prototype the USS *Enterprise*. Fans also point to devices such as the communicator, which foreshadowed today’s portable phones.

FILLING OUT STAR TREK AND MAKING IT “REAL”

Star Trek, like many other shows, actively encourages a “suspension of disbelief” and sets itself up as a “reality” in which fans can exist. The reality of this universe is important to many people. As Richard Weiss, technical advisor to the Air Force, former head of a jet propulsion lab, and an “avowed trekkie,” says, “I believe in *Star Trek*. It’s all within the realm of possibility.”²⁷ Dale Adams, who quit his job as an aerospace engineer to sell *Star Trek* merchandise, proclaims that “*Star Trek* isn’t about a television series, it’s about faith in our future.”²⁸

There has been an entire industry built up around “filling out” the *Star Trek* universe. Reference books such as the *Star Trek Encyclopedia* and *Star Trek: The Next Generation Technical Manual* (which details the specifications of Starfleet ships) have been among the most popular.²⁹ Dictionaries have been compiled for the languages of three *Star Trek* alien species: Klingon, Vulcan, and Romulan. The entire history, geography, philosophy, and even the purported location of the planet Vulcan has been described, sometimes with the full cooperation of people at academic institutions and even NASA.³⁰ There is a journal for the study of the Klingon language (*HolQed*), and a Klingon language camp one can attend. The *Star Trek* universe has been filled out with just about everything to make it a full, consistent reality, to enable one to live within this universe. This universe is much larger and more complex than any other fictional universe, such as that of the J. R. R. Tolkien novels and the game somewhat based on it, *Dungeons and Dragons*. *Star Wars* has also become an extremely popular universe, but without the realism and science found in *Star Trek*.

The coherence of this alternate universe must be maintained in order for fans to continue their “suspension of disbelief.” As a result, there is a *Star Trek* “canon”: as a regularly posted guide to one internet Usenet newsgroup defines it,

“Canon” means that Gene Roddenberry (or his duly appointed representative) has declared something to be officially part of the “*Star Trek*” universe.

This includes the television episodes and the movies. “Non-canon” is everything else (the books, the animated series, comic books, the story you made up when you were playing “*Star Trek*” with your friends during recess . . .).³¹

The fans of *Star Trek* have taken this given universe of *Star Trek*—the canon—and filled it out in order to make a consistent, utopian world in which science has given us control over the problems of life we experience and read about in the papers. Ironically, in order to complete the *Star Trek* universe, both the creators of the show and the fans have to rely on both science and magic. The technology used is given a veneer of scientific reality, but most fans recognize that most of the technology is made up, and is thus closer to magic. Science thus turns into magic, a state of affairs anticipated in new religions where magic/science is relied upon to provide control in areas outside our ability to master.³²

I would argue that all of this fan creativity—the invention and filling out of an entire universe—is a creation of mythology similar to processes of mythological creation in other cultures through the ages. The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss uses the term *bricoleur* (French for “handyman”) to illustrate the process of creating mythology: *bricoleurs* use the available “tools” and “materials” of the culture to create a mythological structure over a period of time.³³ *Star Trek* fan *bricoleurs* act not on their own culture, but on the alternative (but related) one they have constructed. Creating new plots and stories and ironing out existing ones—discussing the canon and writing new fan literature to fill in gaps in character biographies, planet details, or technology—is essentially a way to resolve the contradictions which are an affront to the consistent universe that fans so desperately want to create.

In calling the activities of *Star Trek* fandom “mythological,” I do not intend to eliminate the “playful” or entertainment aspect of *Star Trek* and claim that it is only serious. There is certainly a mix of entertainment and seriousness about *Star Trek* among fans, but this coexistence is also present in the creation of “primitive” mythology. Do the traditional consumers of mythology take it to be only literally true? Here too, there is an ambiguous mixture of reality and unreality, of entertainment and mythology. One can see this in rituals that involve masking, where the masked figure personifies the ambiguity between the person underneath the mask and the spirit which is the mask. Participation in a masked performance, as in the *Star Trek* universe, often involves pretending, but utterly serious pretending.³⁴

Play is serious business, as Victor Turner makes clear in his discussion of the ludic aspects of ritual.³⁵ In industrial societies, however, play

and seriousness have become separated. *Star Trek* fandom, I believe, is an example of play and ritual coming back together, back to their "natural" condition of coexistence and ambiguity. *Star Trek* fandom does not have the thoroughgoing seriousness of more established religions, but it is not mere entertainment. This interplay of seriousness and entertainment, I argue, is a sign of its vitality.

Religious movements are often persecuted or looked down upon because of their zealotry. And indeed, there is a stigma associated with *Star Trek* fandom. Non-fans react against the "seriousness" of *Star Trek* because they believe it should remain totally in the realm of entertainment, and the fact that people take it seriously offends them. *Star Trek* fans, in turn, want to be respected and understood, and want their devotion to be recognized as legitimate, even as many of them try to distance themselves from a segment of fans whom they believe to have gone "too far" in their fan activities. *Star Trek* elicits this type of controversy because it exists in the liminal area between entertainment and seriousness. It is in this interplay between "seriousness and diversion," a common feature of religion,³⁶ that we see the roots of the tension over *Star Trek* between its fandom and the general public.

CONCLUSION

In a society that has become more diverse (or, as some say, "disunited"), mass popular culture has become the new unifying element. By providing a certain commonality and unity of purpose for a wide variety of people, *Star Trek* takes on many elements of "civil religion": a generalizing of religious belief necessary for an integrated society, as a counter to pluralizing trends that divide society. In the U.S., it is expressed in a sense of national purpose and destiny, and includes notions of both moral and material progress.³⁷ These humanistic ideals become a model for others. This is exactly what seems to have happened by the time of *Star Trek's* United Federation of Planets, the guardian of universal peace, prosperity, and self-determination, and a direct outgrowth of twentieth-century American faith in science, humanity, and a positive future. Fans latch on to the *Star Trek* vision that these ideals will eventually triumph, and they enthusiastically continue to fill out and participate in the *Star Trek* universe.

Americans are traditionally forward looking, and it is events like the space race that animate them. For many fans of popular culture, orga-

nized religion seems less relevant, partly because they perceive it as backward looking rather than forward looking. Exceptions are to be found among some conservative religious denominations that speak in specific terms about the future, but enthusiasm for mainline denominations is lacking among baby boomers, who regard them primarily as community organizations which can teach their children good values.³⁸

Meanwhile, popular culture, especially television and film, attempts to fill the religious void. In the ways described above, *Star Trek* has become a "cultural religion" (as discussed in the introduction to this volume) that reflects many Americans' most widely held beliefs. *Star Trek* fandom expresses Americans' idealism, and offers fans reasons for hope in the future. In this sense, it is a phenomenon born in popular culture that has taken on serious, religious functions.

NOTES

1. See Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).
2. See Bjo Trimble, *On the Good Ship Enterprise* (Norfolk, Va.: Donning, 1983), 22 ff.
3. "Fandom" is a term that is commonly used to describe people who actively follow specific TV, film, or other popular culture productions.
4. See Olivier Tschannen, "The Secularization Paradigm: A Systematization," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30 (1991): 395-415.
5. Talal Asad, "Anthropological Conceptions on Religion: Reflections on Geertz," *Man* 18 (1983): 237-59, 245.
6. This corresponds with the "functional" definition of religion described by Bruce David Forbes in the introduction to this volume.
7. Jean Pouillon, "Remarks on the Verb, 'to believe'," in *Between Belief and Transgression*, ed. Michel Izard and Pierre Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982), 1-8.
8. Two writers who stress the changing and disguised forms of religion are Thomas Luckmann ("Religion Old and New," in *Social Theory in a Changing Society*, ed. Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman [Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1991], 167-82, especially 169) and William H. Swatos, Jr. ("Enchantment and Disenchantment in Modernity: The Significance of 'Religion' as a Sociological Category," *Sociological Analysis* 44 [1983]: 321-338).
9. Frederick Kreuziger, *The Religion of Science Fiction* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University, 1986), 84, 15.
10. Numerous fans have stated this in personal interviews with me. See also Jacqueline Lichtenberg et al., *Star Trek Lives!* (New York: Bantam, 1975), and David Gerrold, *The World of Star Trek* (New York: Bluejay Books, 1984), first published in 1973.

11. Alan Asherman, *The Star Trek Compendium* (New York: Pocket, 1989), 2.
12. Conrad Kottak, *Prime Time Society* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1990), 101-2; the phrase "secular myth" is from Pierre Hegy, *Myth as Foundation for Society and Values* (Lewiston, Maine: Edwin Mellen, 1991), 21.
13. See Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Anthropology and the Savage Slot," in *Recapturing Anthropology*, ed. Richard Fox (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1991), 17-44.
14. The popularity of the optimistic, progressive view of the world has normally been much stronger than the apocalyptic, pessimistic view (which also goes back to biblical apocalyptic themes). There have been popular science fiction movies in the apocalyptic vein (e.g., *Blade Runner*), but the initial draw of these movies did not coalesce into the popular universe created by the vast cultural acceptance of *Star Trek*, which demonstrates the resonance of a future universe-wide utopia.
15. See David Alexander, "Gene Roddenberry: writer, producer, philosopher, humanist," *The Humanist* 51 (March/April 1991): 5-38.
16. Steve Paulson, "Free Enterprise," *Isthmus*, 27 September 1991, 27-9, quotation from 29.
17. Frederik Pohl, "Astounding Story," *American Heritage* 40 (Sept/Oct 1989): 42-54, quotation from 47.
18. Alan Asherman, *The Star Trek Compendium* (New York: Pocket, 1989), 2.
19. James Van Hise, *The Trek Fan's Handbook* (Las Vegas: Pioneer Books, 1990), 90.
20. See Ken Thompson, "Secularization and Sacralization," in *Rethinking Progress*, ed. Jeffrey Alexander and Piotr Sztompka (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 161-81.
21. Jim Rubino, "Signing On for the New Voyages," *Dateline Starfleet* 21, March 1992.
22. Michael Okuda and Denise Okuda, *Star Trek Chronology: a history of the future* (New York: Pocket, 1993).
23. See Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York: Meridian, 1958), especially 410 ff.
24. See, for example, James Doohan (with Peter David), *Beam Me Up, Scotty* (New York: Pocket, 1996), 209.
25. See Arthur Greil and David Rudy, "On the Margins of the Sacred," in *In Gods We Trust*, ed. Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1990), 219-32, especially 226.
26. James Van Hise, *The Trek Fan's Handbook* (Las Vegas: Pioneer Books, 1990), 14.
27. "Defense Cuts Worry Departing Scientist," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 June 1993, B-14.
28. "Trekking Off to Harvey," *Chicago Tribune*, 27 June 1993, "Tempo SW"-2.
29. Michael Okuda et al., *The Star Trek Encyclopedia: A Reference Guide*

- to the Future (New York: Pocket, 1997); Rick Sternbach and Michael Okuda, *Star Trek: The Next Generation Technical Manual* (New York: Pocket, 1991).
30. See, for example, the letters page of *Sky & Telescope* 82, no. 1 (July 1991): 5.
 31. Otto Heuer, rec.arts.startrek "FAQ" (usenet post, 1992).
 32. Swatos, "Enchantment and Disenchantment," 330. The 1997 Heaven's Gate suicide cult members are an example of those who mix science with pseudoscience, and they were also avid watchers of *Star Trek*.
 33. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 16 ff.
 34. Lessa and Vogt, *Reader in Comparative Religion*, 414.
 35. Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 32.
 36. Lessa and Vogt, *Reader in Comparative Religion*, 414.
 37. Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America" in *American Civil Religion*, ed. Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 21-44, especially 38-41.
 38. Dean Hoge, Benton Johnson, and Donald Luidens, *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), especially 75-7, 147-50, 159.

“Our common future” to which the Earth Charter refers, is only possible with common faith in our future. That means that world faiths need to establish a common understanding based on shared values. Science and technology gives us knowledge of the physical world around us; only faith can change our habits and attitudes. The Charter refers to this conversion as “a change of mind and heart”. However, it is also the Sikh belief that God has no equal, nor can God’s creation be emulated. It is human arrogance which leads us to believe that we can emulate what nature has produced over millions of years; that we can restore nature’s fine balance for sustaining life while we continue to use up natural resources at an ever accelerating pace. It’s how we make them that sets us apart, because every single day, worlds are colliding, and our choices shape so much more than just our own story. And if we want to change this world for the better, then we must be the best possible version of ourselves, because who we are in each moment is a gift to the universe. This is what the present is: when the sum of one person’s past meets a world’s collective future.” Sarah Ayoub.

I fear for the future of the West if it loses its faith. You cannot defend Western freedom on the basis of moral relativism, the only morality left when we lose our mooring in a sacred ontology or a divine-human covenant. No secular morality withstood Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia.