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Jennifer E. Porter and Darcee L McLaren, eds. *Star Trek and Sacred Ground: Explorations of Star Trek, Religion, and American Culture*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999. Pp. xii + 315. \$20.95 (Paper).

[1] The contributors to this anthology, which includes an introduction, twelve essays, an index, and a helpful bibliography, represent a variety of academic disciplines, including anthropology and biblical studies, although their most common specialization is religious studies. From these perspectives, the authors explore the relationship between *Star Trek*, religion, and (to a lesser degree) American culture. The major sections of the collection consider (1) the various series' approaches to religion; (2) "the religious and mythic themes" which appear in *Star Trek*; and (3) "the religious, mythic, and ritual aspects of Star Trek fandom" (5, 7). In scope, therefore, the volume's project is both interesting and ambitious.

[2] Perhaps because their focus is comparatively narrow, sections one and three are the most effective parts of the anthology. A number of these essays are noteworthy: Annie Mackenzie Pearson, for example, provides an overview of the series' portrayal of religion and explains the significance of series' creator Gene Roddenberry's religious views. Peter Linford thoughtfully analyzes the ambiguous role of Bajoran religion in *Deep Space Nine* (although the essay was evidently completed before the series's final episodes) while editors Porter and McLaren emphasize the parallels between New Age Spirituality and religion in the *Voyager* series. From the five essays in section one, the reader acquires a good sense of how the treatment of religion has developed over the course of the various series and films. Similarly, section three emphasizes the significance of *Star Trek* for its fans: as a "folk philosophy" (Michael Jindra, 218-20) and as a "contemporary secular myth" (McLaren, 232). In the concluding essay, Jennifer Porter evaluates the *Star Trek* Convention as a secular pilgrimage, in light of the anthropological categories of Victor Turner. Though one could expand both sections, the essays certainly fulfill the volume's general goals.

[3] In contrast, section two is disappointing, probably because its topic, the recurrent religious and mythical themes of *Star Trek*, is so broad. Jon Wagner's treatment of the series' approach to human mortality is very impressive, but the section as a whole proves

unsatisfying, less because of what is said than because of what remains to be said. Two of the essays (those of Larry Kreitzer and Ian Maher) explore *Star Trek* as an illustration of specific themes (sacrifice and redemption, spiritual quest) developed from a Christian perspective, while the third (Jeffrey Scott Lamp's) draws parallels between the series' treatment of sacred texts and certain trends within biblical scholarship, notably the Jesus Seminar. Although interesting, this certainly does not exhaust the range of the series' "religious and mythic themes." Contributions from other religious traditions (Buddhist themes in *Star Trek*?) would definitely strengthen the presentation in this regard. Focused, explicit attention to the ethics of *Star Trek* (the Prime Directive as deontological norm?) might also be helpful. Perhaps the editors will address these lacunae in a second volume.

[4] The cumulative effect of the essays is to emphasize that interpretation mirrors the interpreter's perspective. Commenting on the same line of dialogue from *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier*, for example, Ian Maher and Robert Asa offer radically different assessments. For Maher, Kirk's suggestion that God may be "right here . . . human heart," evokes John 4:21-24 and indwelling grace (172). Asa argues, on the other hand, that "while this ambiguous comment could be taken to mean *in* the human heart, the collective history of Classic *Star Trek* suggests that God *is* (or, is no more than) the human heart" (46). Jindra's observations concerning the attraction of *Star Trek* for a religiously-diverse body of fans are helpful in understanding such differences (223-25). Moreover, whatever the intentions of Gene Roddenberry, some *Star Trek* narratives involving religion, such as "Who Mourns for Adonais?" (analyzed by Asa in light of the Death of God Movement, and characterized by Pearson as a claim concerning human emancipation from the need for higher beings) are unlikely to disconcert conventional believers precisely because they involve the repudiation of "false" gods. Thus, the same episode may lend itself to agnostic, anti-religious, and conventionally religious interpretations, depending upon the perspective of the interpreter. No doubt this openness has contributed to the series' broad appeal.

[5] As Jennifer Porter and Darcee McLaren point out in the introduction, *Star Trek* has already lasted more than three decades, through four television series, nine films, and countless other manifestations. In the exploration of its relationship to religion, this anthology's contributors have created a collection of significant interest to students of religion and popular culture - and to *Star Trek* fans. If their work is any indication, then the disciplines of theology and religious studies include representatives of the latter as well as the former.

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