

## Foreword: Thinking About Religion and *Doctor Who*

When BBC science fiction show *Doctor Who* first hit British television screens on 23rd November 1963, there was little expectation that it would transform from a teatime slot filler into a behemoth that would still be running (at the time of writing) some fifty two years later. Neither could its writers, actors and producers suspect that it would become a staple of British popular culture and identity, or that it would generate a worldwide fandom that continues to celebrate its love of the show in everything from DVD and magazine sales to fan fiction; cosplay to *Doctor Who* themed weddings. For those with an interest in British religious history, the date of the programme's creation might appear to be suggestive. 1963 was, after all, the year pinpointed by Callum Brown as the “death of Christian Britain” (Brown 2009), and while many would claim that Brown's obituary was somewhat premature (e.g. Clark 2012; Green 2010), it is impossible to argue that the nature of faith and belief in Britain hasn't changed greatly since the TARDIS doors first swung open.

This issue of *Implicit Religion* attempts to examine some of these changes in terms of the religious practices, implicit and explicit, that have developed around *Doctor Who* over the course of its long history. The authors of the articles included here have looked at the way in which explicit religious practices – such as reading the programme as a form of Buddhist koan, for example – might challenge the sacred/secular dichotomy which is still presumed in much scholarship.<sup>1</sup> Others have examined the show more directly through the lens of implicit religion. Many of these papers had their genesis in a conference held at the University of Manchester in November 2013 on “Religion and *Doctor Who*”, although some (such as James McGrath's) have been specially written for this volume. In this foreword, I aim to think about the ways in which *Doctor Who* and the transmedia worlds that it has generated might be helpfully examined through the concept of implicit religion. At the same time, however, I will express some reservations about the concept itself and the challenges in using it when talking about science fiction, and particularly in discussions of fan cultures. In the interests of full disclosure, I write as someone who appreciates the contribution of implicit religion to studies of popular culture without fully subscribing to the concept myself.

### **I. *Doctor Who*: An Introduction**

For those readers who have a general interest in implicit religion, but are unfamiliar with *Doctor Who*, a brief introduction to the programme and its complex mythos is necessary. *Doctor Who* originally ran from 1963 until 1989, when it was “rested” (e.g. cancelled) by the BBC. An American co-production attempted to resurrect the show in a 1996 TV movie, but this proved unsuccessful in the United States and no new series followed. In 2005, under the stewardship of award-winning writer Russell T Davies, the BBC revived the show to popular and critical acclaim, as well as international success. This success led to two spin-off series:

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<sup>1</sup> For a complexification of this dichotomy see Lynch 2013.

the “darker” and more “adult oriented” *Torchwood* (2006-2011) and the children’s series *The Sarah Jane Adventures* (2007-2011).<sup>2</sup>

*Doctor Who*, as its name suggests, is focused upon the Doctor, a Time Lord from the planet Gallifrey who travels the universe in search of adventure. The Doctor does not typically travel alone, but takes a (usually) human (often young female) companion, or companions, with him. The Doctor is in awe of the universe and its natural wonders, and he aims to introduce his human companions to these (although at times companions been taken as stowaways or, as in the first episodes, kidnapped).

The Doctor and his companions travel in a space-time machine known as the TARDIS, an acronym that stands for Time and Relative Dimension in Space. The TARDIS can travel anywhere and “anywhen”, and has the ability to blend into its local surroundings by adopting an inconspicuous exterior form. Sadly for the Doctor (but happily for the BBC’s accountants) the Doctor’s TARDIS is stuck in the form of a 1950’s London Police Box. One of the vehicle’s most famous dimensional traits is that it is bigger on the inside than on the outside, containing suites of rooms, swimming pools, kitchens and libraries. As a Time Lord, the Doctor also has the ability to “regenerate”, a process in which his appearance and personality changes, but his memories and inner-being remain the same.<sup>3</sup> As a result of this, fans will often use the names of actors and the numerical designation of a particular Doctor interchangeably. So reference might be made to “Tom Baker’s Doctor” or to “the Fourth Doctor”. In recent years, it has been established that Time Lords might change gender at regeneration, although to date only male actors have played the Doctor.

During his travels, the Doctor has come across a number of alien and human opponents who have proved important within both the programme’s mythology and in wider British popular culture. The most famous of these are the Daleks. Originally human-like Kaleds from the planet Skaro, through genetic mutation they are now encased within pepper-pot shaped metallic casings and have removed every emotion other than hatred from their minds. They aim to conquer the universe and “exterminate” every non-Dalek lifeform. Besides the Daleks, the Cybermen are the programme’s most recognisable villain. Cybermen were formerly human beings who replaced every part of their body with artificial components in a bid for immortality. While their brains and skeletons remain organic, they have removed every emotion (including hatred) as a sign of human weakness. Although these alien species often return to cause the Doctor problems, his personal nemesis remains The Master, a fellow Time Lord dedicated to causing chaos. In the most recent series, the Master regenerated into female form for the first time.

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<sup>2</sup> Although both ended in 2011, *Torchwood* has never been officially cancelled, and rumours of a return persist. *The Sarah Jane Adventures* ended in sad circumstances, with the death of star and former *Doctor Who* companion Elisabeth Sladen from cancer in 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Thirteen actors have played the Doctor on television: William Hartnell (1963-66), Patrick Troughton (1966-69), Jon Pertwee (1970-74), Tom Baker (1974-81), Peter Davison (1982-84), Colin Baker (1984-6), Sylvester McCoy (1987-89), Paul McGann (1996), Christopher Eccleston (2005), David Tennant (2005-2010), Matt Smith (2010-2013), John Hurt (2013) and Peter Capaldi (2014-). Confusingly, Capaldi is technically the twelfth Doctor as Hurt, who only appeared in 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary special “Day of the Doctor” (2013), represents a previously unknown incarnation who refused to call himself “Doctor”. Canonically, this incarnation (referred to as the “War Doctor”) comes between that of McGann and Eccleston.

These elements of the series have reappeared repeatedly throughout its run, but have evolved as new producers, writers and actors have played with the core elements of the show. This detail only scratches the surface of *Doctor Who*, which has developed its own complex mythology not only through the TV show, but in comics, novels, audio adventures and video games alongside the main series. The sheer amount of content available to *Doctor Who* fans is therefore mind-boggling: viewing the surviving televisual material alone would take nearly 16 days of uninterrupted viewing, before even beginning to consider the 268 original novels published in various series since the TV show's hiatus in 1989 and the 197 full-length audio adventures produced under license by Big Finish Productions. While, for reasons of brevity, I have restricted discussion to the television show here, a thorough approach to *Doctor Who* must therefore be aware of its nature as a vast transmedia franchise, rather than solely focusing on its televisual incarnation (see Jenkins 2006a; Harrigan and Wardrip-Fruin 2009; Britton 2011).

## II. Religion in *Doctor Who*: Explicit and Implicit

There are a number of reasons as to why *Doctor Who* might serve as a helpful lens when examining contemporary religion. After all, its lead character as a morally driven hero, given to sacrifice and blessed with the ability to seemingly raise himself from the dead, might appear to offer a suitable comparison to Christ (see Amy-Chin 2010; Deller 2010; McCormack 2011; Wardley 2013). Indeed, *Doctor Who* has often been used as an allegorical support by Christian groups attempting to connect with or through popular culture. For example, in 2008 the Church of England's "Church Army" encouraged ministers to use *Doctor Who* in their preaching at a "*Doctor Who* and Spirituality Day" (Wynne-Jones 2008). Books such as Anthony Thacker's *Behind the Sofa* (2006) and Matt Rawle's forthcoming *The Salvation of Doctor Who: A Small Group Study Connecting Christ and Culture* (2015) suggest ways in which the show might be used to connect with both Christians and non-Christians through their shared cultural knowledge of *Doctor Who*. Neither these books, nor the Church Army, made the claim that *Doctor Who* was a Christian text. Instead they equated the themes and ideas found in certain episodes of the series as analogous with Christianity and used it as a way of connecting Christ and culture.

It is not just Christians who have found their faith within *Doctor Who*. Liel Liebovitz playfully suggested that the Doctor might be "the greatest Jewish character in the history of television". Liebovitz cited the role of BBC Head of Drama Sydney Newman and producer Verity Lambert (who were both Jewish) in the show's early years, the placelessness of the Doctor, and his fight against the Daleks as an allegory of "the canny Jew versus the canned Nazis" (2013). Similar points are made by Nathan Abrahams, who notes that "like a time-travelling rabbi or wise man, the Doctor is a living Talmud, a storehouse of the universe's wisdom, accrued over millennia" (2013). Like the Christian writers above, these Jewish commentators saw markers of their faith in the characters, plots, and setup of the programme. In such a way, *Doctor Who* was claimed as something possessing its own form of *implicit* Judaism.

While these positions are faith-based interpretations of the programme, it is also true that *Doctor Who* has made conscious use of religious themes and imagery in both its pre-1989 and more recent episodes. Barry Letts, producer from 1969-1974, was a committed Buddhist who admitted working themes from his faith into some episodes he wrote and produced. Third Doctor Jon Pertwee's onscreen regeneration into Tom Baker was thus overseen by a Buddhist monk, while the Doctor was not averse to adapting the Zen "flower sermon" to explain how he learnt the meaning of life.<sup>4</sup> At other times, following the well-established pattern of horror cinema, pagan "cults" have proved a reliable channel for extra-terrestrial forces such as the alien "Dæmons" ("The Dæmons" [1971]) and Fendahl ("Image of the Fendahl" [1977]), or the intelligence of the Mandragora Helix ("The Masque of Mandragora" [1976]).<sup>5</sup> Churches have at times featured prominently, whether used by the Master to summon aliens (under a less than subtle disguise as the Rev. Magister), or serving as places in which faith can be questioned and undermined by otherworldly forces (e.g. "The Dæmons" and "The Curse of Fenric" [1989]).

With the return of the series in 2005 the use of overt religious imagery became more pronounced (see Balstrup 2014; Miller 2013). At times this caused controversy. The image of the Doctor borne aloft in cruciform pose by robotic angels in 2007 Christmas special "Voyage of the Damned" caused pressure group Christian Voice to complain over the implied comparison between the Doctor and Jesus (Metro Staff 2007). While this is a rare instance of a direct complaint relating to the use of this sort of imagery, during Russell T Davies's time as showrunner the use of religious tropes was commonplace. In 2007's "Gridlock", for example, the Doctor visited a society that came together through corporate hymn singing and shared faith: the episode ended with an ascension into clear blue skies to the strains of "Abide with Me". 2008's "Fires of Pompeii" saw the Doctor saving a Roman family from Vesuvius's blast, ending with he and companion Donna being supplicated as the family's "Household Gods". The finale of the 2007 series, "Last of the Time Lords" saw the Master defeated through a planet-wide ritual chanting of the Doctor's name, something dismissively described by the renegade Time Lord as "prayer".

When Davies left the show in 2010, his position as showrunner was taken over by Stephen Moffat. Although his interest in religious imagery differed from Davies, Moffat has continued to make reference to religious themes. In the far-future, the Church now exists as a paramilitary organisation overseen by the "Papal mainframe" ("It's the fifty-first Century. The Church has moved on" ["The Time of Angels" (2010)]). The Doctor has encountered several false gods, whose desire to feed on faith is depicted as deadly ("The God Complex" [2011]) or parasitic ("The Rings of Akhaten" [2013]). Yet at the same time, the Doctor now speaks in a much more relaxed way about the spiritual dimension of the people and aliens he encounters. For example, he is willing to discuss the "sacred life" of clones ("The Rebel

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<sup>4</sup> The Buddha's "flower sermon" saw him holding up an individual flower as a wordless sermon to his disciples. In 1972 episode "The Time Monster", co-written by (an uncredited) Barry Letts and Robert Sloman, the Doctor tells companion Jo of being shown a flower by a Gallifreyan monk and "I looked at it for a moment and suddenly I saw it through his eyes. It was simply glowing with life like a perfectly cut jewel, and the colours were deeper and richer than you could possibly imagine. It was the daisiest daisy I'd ever seen".

<sup>5</sup> For more on this see Waltonen 2013.

Flesh” [2011]); when the twelfth Doctor helps an injured Dalek he tells it that “I saved your life... Now I'm going to go one better. I'm going to save your soul” (“Into the Dalek” [2014]).

These uses of religious imagery and language have caused some commentators to go further in their discussion of the religiosity (implicit or otherwise) of the programme. Stephen Kelly, writing in *The Guardian*, argued that the Doctor might serve as “a god for our times”.

Suggesting that David Cameron’s appeal for Britain to follow “Christian values” was little more than a call for values which are recognised as “good” by the majority, Kelly suggested that it mattered little whether these are taken from the Bible or from science fiction:

In Neil Gaiman's book, *American Gods*, the one-time Who writer plays upon this modern shift by depicting a world in which our worship of certain things – the internet, gambling, TV – take on the physical form of gods themselves, while the gods of old begin to die as faith in them dwindles... And that's just it, isn't it? In the absence of an interventionist God, people simply make their own. After all, when presented with such an abyss, you fill it with whatever you can. (2011)

While this interpretation of religion might be criticised for being overly functionalist, it nonetheless highlights a popular belief that Edward Bailey noted in his study of parish life: for many people, being “Christian” is not about Church attendance or biblical belief, but rather about a certain ideal of moral goodness (1997; see also Williams 1999). Indeed, this form of implicit faith is examined within *Doctor Who* itself. In 2011’s “The God Complex”, the Doctor fought a minotaur-like creature that fed on faith. Deliberately generating fear, the creature caused those it hunted to fall back upon their deepest faith, which it then converted into its own worship. In this episode faith could be explicit, such as the character Rita’s Islam, or implicit. As the Doctor realised, this was:

Not just religious faith, faith in something. Howard believed in conspiracies, that external forces controlled the world. Joe had dice cufflinks and a chain with a horseshoe. He was a gambler. Gamblers believe in luck, an intangible force that helps them win or lose. Gibbis has rejected any personal autonomy and is waiting for the next batch of invaders to oppress him and tell him what to do. They all believe there's something guiding them, about to save them. That's what it replaces. (“The God Complex” [2011])

For the Doctor’s companion Amy, her most fundamental faith lay in the Doctor. For her, he had become (to quote Kelly) “a god for our times”.

Writing in *The Guardian*, Giles Fraser made a similar point. Noting that science fiction relies on ancient myths of good and evil, apocalyptic visions, and spectacles of the bizarre, he questioned why many Atheists who attacked the Bible for its lack of realism, felt able to embrace science fiction:

...if we bracket out the sort of reality that the Bible claims for itself – suspending disbelief as we are encouraged to do in the theatre – then there isn't all that much difference in terms of the imaginative range being offered. It's just that the obviously

fictional genre of *Doctor Who* allows the viewer not to feel threatened by the peculiarities of an ancient worldview. (2013)

Fraser's point may be attacked as naive (as he notes himself, nobody has ever embarked on a holy war inspired by *Doctor Who*), but he nonetheless raises the important issue of implicit religiosity within the programme. Even as he struggles to articulate it, he feels that the show says something important about an underlying religiosity in popular entertainment.

The same point is made, in a tongue-in-cheek way, in Michael M Gilroy-Sinclair's play *Blue Box Messiah*, performed several times in the lead-up to the show's fiftieth anniversary in 2013. The play centres on two fans who debate whether or not *Doctor Who* might be considered to be a religion. As Luke, who argues in favour of the proposal, suggests: "It's part of our lives in the same way that religion used to be part of everyone's lives... The average human has this... erm... hole. Yes... A hole in their soul. A gap... deep inside them that gets filled with something. In some people's cases it's food or football. Or shopping, or soap operas, but that's the same hole that used to be filled by religion" (2013, loc. 102-106).

It is therefore possible to profitably think about *Doctor Who* in terms of implicit religion. To take Bailey's focus on the three key attributes of implicit religion – commitments, integrating foci and intensive concerns with extensive effects – each can be applied to a science-fiction franchise such as *Doctor Who*.

Commitments, as Bailey noted, do not need to be exclusive and can be expressed at a variety of levels. *Doctor Who* engenders commitment at its lowest level from those who watch every week, but this can be expanded into much wider commitments – to collecting, organised fan meet-ups, tattoos based on the show, or to debating what is and isn't "canon" within the programme. The integrating foci for the viewer might concern a deep personal experience with the show, the centrality of the programme as part of one's own childhood, or later experiences within fandom. On a broader scale, some see *Doctor Who* as part of a distinctly British national identity (Cull 2001; Knox 2014). Both these commitments and integrating foci generate "intensive concerns", with the "extensive effects" visible in the cultural impact of the show and in individuals' lives – as the two fans in Gilroy-Sinclair's play suggest. But perhaps most pertinently, *Doctor Who* has often upheld what Bailey described as "the (implicit) religion of contemporary society... a commitment to the human" (1997, 273).

As David Layton has explored in depth, *Doctor Who* can be associated with a subtle and thoughtful exposition of philosophical humanism (2012). The Doctor's celebration of humanity has been a consistent element of the series, and has culminated in numerous speeches celebrating the wonders of humanity:

Homo sapiens. What an inventive, invincible species! It's only a few million years since they've crawled up out of the mud and learned to walk. Puny, defenceless bipeds. They've survived flood, famine and plague. They've survived cosmic wars and holocausts, and now here they are amongst the stars, waiting to begin a new life, ready to outsit eternity. They're indomitable. Indomitable! ("Ark in Space" [1975])

The perversion or rejection of an essential humanity is often the reason for the Doctor's disgust. Cybermen are to be rejected because they have forgotten what it is to be truly human: "once you get rid of sickness and mortality, then what's there to strive for, eh? The Cybermen won't advance. You'll just stop. You'll stay like this forever. A metal Earth with metal men and metal thoughts, lacking the one thing that makes this planet so alive. People. Ordinary, stupid, brilliant people" ("Age of Steel" [2006]). When desperate Daleks harvest human cells to reproduce their dying race, the Doctor feels (some limited) pity towards the creatures: "Driven mad by your own flesh. The stink of humanity. You hate your own existence" ("Parting of the Ways" [2005]).<sup>6</sup> Humans, as a more philosophical Dalek later tells the Doctor, "are the great survivors" ("Evolution of the Daleks" [2007]).

Yet for all this valorisation of humanity, *Doctor Who* also challenges viewers. It asks them to examine their own beliefs, whether implicit or explicit, and to think about the sorts of foundations they rest upon. While the Doctor might praise humanity, at the same time he can describe them as "stupid apes" or comment on their inherent cruelty ("Father's Day" [2005]; "The Beast Below" [2010]). As the Master notes while watching evolved humans murdering their own ancestors: "Human race, greatest monsters of them all" ("Last of the Time Lords" [2007]).

*Doctor Who* therefore challenges viewers to think about their own social and ethical systems, and the principles underlying them. The celebration of the human can be tempered, and new ideas explored. The Doctor, after all, claims that he travels for the experience of discovering new things and being surprised. In a telling conversation in 2006 episode "The Satan Pit", an episode discussed in more detail in Holly Jordan's article, the Doctor debates belief with a scientist as they face a creature claiming to be the Devil:

DOCTOR: I didn't ask. Have you got any sort of faith?

IDA: Not really. I was brought up Neo Classic Congregational, because of my mum [...] But no, I never believed. [...] What about you?

DOCTOR: I believe, I believe I haven't seen everything, I don't know. It's funny, isn't it? The things you make up. The rules. If that thing had said it came from beyond the universe, I'd believe it, but before the universe? Impossible. Doesn't fit my rule. Still, that's why I keep travelling. To be proved wrong.

The willingness to challenge "the rules", to question the implicit beliefs of contemporary culture, remains one of the strengths of *Doctor Who*. This tends to happen more often to companions rather than to the Doctor himself, a theme that Jasper Peters explores in more detail in his article in this volume. The pairing of a centuries old alien being and a young, human traveller often generates a form of "culture shock" which questions the basis on which "sacred" beliefs are held. In 2005's "The Unquiet Dead", for example, the Doctor offers humanity's discarded cadavers to the disembodied alien Gelth as a means of ensuring their survival. The scheme causes a great deal of disquiet for his 19-year old companion Rose:

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<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that a symptom of the Daleks' madness is seen in their turning to religion.

ROSE: You can't let them run around inside of dead people.

DOCTOR: Why not? It's like recycling.

ROSE: Seriously though, you can't.

DOCTOR: Seriously though, I can.

ROSE: It's just wrong. Those bodies were living people. We should respect them even in death.

DOCTOR: Do you carry a donor card?

ROSE: That's different. That's...

DOCTOR: It is different, yeah. It's a different morality. Get used to it or go home.

Rose struggles to articulate *why* the deceased should be respected over the living Gelth. When *Doctor Who* is at its most provocative it successfully questions the implicitly accepted shibboleths of everyday life, asking viewers provocative questions about what makes us view certain issues and areas as bordering on the sacred. This is perhaps best illustrated by the controversy surrounding the final episodes of the 2014 series, “Dark Water” and “Death in Heaven”. The episodes centre on the premise that Cybermen are working with the Master to harvest dead bodies and convert them. To do this, they have convinced humanity to preserve bodies by abandoning cremation: not only is life after death presented by the Doctor’s enemies as a reality, but they claim that “there is one simple, horrible possibility that has never occurred to anyone throughout human history... The dead remain conscious. The dead are fully aware of everything that is happening to them” (“Dark Water” [2014]). The “recordings” from the afterlife, of desperate voices begging not to be cremated, are undoubtedly one of the most disturbing things to have appeared in the series to date, and the episodes attracted more complaints than any other since the show’s return in 2005 (Appleton 2014; Guardian 2014).

Given all this, it is perhaps no surprise that Russell T Davies directly remarked that his revived version of *Doctor Who* was interested in addressing the issue of implicit religion. As a committed atheist, Davies has nonetheless written extensively about religion, most notably in 2003 ITV drama *The Second Coming*, starring future-Doctor Christopher Eccleston as a video store assistant who realised that he was Christ returned to earth. In a 2009 interview with *The Daily Telegraph*, Davies responded to criticisms that his portrayal of the Doctor was overly messianic by denying any special interest in Christianity. Instead, he claimed to be interested in a much wider phenomenon of what could be termed implicit religion:

I think it [religion] informs our entire culture. If it's raining, we blame the rain. Even the most atheist one of us. If we're filming something vital in Cardiff, and it's raining, my first instinct is to look at the sky and ask 'Why? Why today?' I'm fascinated by that instinct – we're not an agnostic society, we're still driven powerfully by religion, whether it's believing in chakras and that nonsense or the proper formalised stuff.



That instinct to look up and blame something or worship something is fundamental to us, and I'm fascinated by that – because I think it's absolutely wrong (Colville 2009).

### III. Looking at Implicit Religion in *Doctor Who*

Given all of this, and the richness of the essays that make up this issue of *Implicit Religion*, there is much to be gained by the study of implicit religion in *Doctor Who* and other science-fiction series. Yet in closing, I must nonetheless voice my own reservations and cautions about the subject. A strand of scholarship on religion and science-fiction/fantasy has often seen the imagined worlds they create, and dedicated fandoms which spring up around them, as a form of surrogate or replacement religion. I have recently written against this tendency, arguing that equating fandom with religion is at best a symptom of what Sean McCloud has called “parallelomania” (2003), and at worst a damaging pathologization of fans, which ignores the way in which fandom and more traditional forms of religiosity can be combined in fan culture (Crome 2014).

I continue to strongly oppose the sorts of comparisons which claim that popular culture, or fandom, serves to *replace* religion as an alternative form of secularised belief. The strength of implicit religion, as it asks us to apply the methodological tools of religious studies to the realm usually thought of as secular, is that it both challenges and enables scholars to think about the extent to which categories such as sacrality, ritual, and faith can be applied to traditionally “non-religious” behaviours or spaces. At the same time, in recognising that implicit religion can be combined with explicit faith in greater or lesser degrees, it avoids the implication of excessive or false worship that sometimes accompanies the comparison of popular culture with religion.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, in seeking to look beyond finding straight-forward parallels between explicit and implicit religion, the concept generally avoids the danger of making arbitrary comparisons between religious and secular forms (Bailey 1997, 40-42).

Nonetheless, I would still express some reservations. While Bailey asserts that implicit religion “will probably not be perceived by its actors to be religious” (Bailey 2010, 272), I would hesitate to go so far. As I have previously noted, there is a danger that we presume “the right to declare which activities are and are not religious, while ignoring the views of those actually engaged in them”, producing a picture of activities unrecognisable to those who participate in them (Crome 2014, 400). I therefore remain deeply sceptical of the value of describing these practices as “religious” *per se*.<sup>8</sup>

While my own interests therefore relate to the use of *Doctor Who* in terms of its engagement with explicit religion, I would nonetheless argue that thinking about what the show can tell us about implicit religion is a thought-provoking and useful exercise for scholars working at the intersection of religion and popular culture. In thinking about the way in which *Doctor Who* has served as resource for established religion, articulated and challenged secular notions of

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<sup>7</sup> For examples of the equation of fandom with “false worship” see Doss 1999 and Giles 2000. See The classic argument for “fandom of religion” is Jindra 1994. While Jindra avoids the pathologization that Doss presumes, I agree with Jenkins that the comparison is unhelpful on its own terms. See Jenkins 2006b, 1-24.

<sup>8</sup> See also Erdozain 2010, and especially p.18 for his comments on implicit religion. A more nuanced approach to what Markus Altena Davidsen has called “fiction-based religion” might be more profitable (2013).

the sacred, and critically examined both implicit and explicit religion, it is a fruitful exercise in numerous and sometimes unanticipated ways.

The Doctor once spoke about his travels and the way in which they combined the mundane with the incredible: “worlds... where the sky is burning, and the sea’s asleep, and the rivers dream; people made of smoke and cities made of song. Somewhere there’s danger, somewhere there’s injustice, and somewhere else the tea’s getting cold” (“Survival” [1989]). Each of the essays that follow invites us to embark upon that journey to be, in the best traditions of both scholarship and *Doctor Who*, amazed by both the unexpected and the supposedly mundane. Each article explores the complexities of the categories we are tempted to reduce into binaries: sacred and profane, secular and religious, mundane and miraculous. To quote one character whose life was touched by the Doctor, it is when we move beyond our usual avenues of research that we challenge ourselves to rethink our scholarship and our certainties: to discover that “the truth is, the world is so much stranger than that. It’s so much darker. And so much madder. And so much better” (“Love and Monsters” [2006]).