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The Fellowship Of Unbelievers

Beginning Religion Over Again Since 1994

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FICTIONAL RELIGIONS

“Man is certainly stark mad. He cannot make a worm, and yet he will be making gods by the dozens.” - Michel de Montaigne [1533 – 1592]

Fiction and Religion have a large overlap. Some might say, with justification, that religions are all fictional. Certainly, many religions have their roots in fiction. Yet fiction serves a purpose and nothing shows this better than that the entertainment industry takes in over \$700 billion annually just in the United States and accounts for about 2.5% of GDP worldwide. Many elements of religion are admittedly fictional. Even the Jesus character in the Gospels is said to have always addressed the crowds using fanciful stories that he would then explain privately to his closest disciples. When asked about this all three synoptics have it that Jesus replied saying:

“All these things are done in parables, that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand.” [see Matthew 13:13, Mark 4:12 and Luke 8:10]

This is puzzling for many reasons, not the least of which is that if the crowds said to have followed and listened to Jesus would not have perceived or understood him – and the Gospels do not relate the explanation of all of Jesus' stories – what hope is there for anyone separated by such a vast gulf of time, place, language and culture to make proper sense of his teachings? Perhaps Jesus' parables were intended to instruct while leaving some room for interpretation, much like *Aesop's Fables* which predated the Gospels by 500-600 years. Some have compared the Gospel parables to Buddhist koans which had their origins a millennium before Christianity got underway. Of course, myths relating to deities from cultures all over the world

are of this same character since it is unclear just how seriously they were taken or intended to be taken. Our ancestors were ignorant of many things but they were not stupid. One can only wonder about those who today insist that everything in the Bible – or other “holy books” – is absolutely literally true. At the least they do not grasp the difference between taking something seriously and taking it literally.

Just as fiction can be found in religion, religion can be found in fiction:

The Klingon and Bajoran religions as well as other religions and even the origins of religious ideas figure in the various *Star Trek* series. In the *Star Trek* film *The Final Frontier*, a renegade Vulcan enlists human and alien species to commandeer the Enterprise in order to travel to a remote planet to find the “God” of their various religious traditions, only to find that it is a malevolent force.

In the *Star Wars* films the Jedi and Sith study and manipulate the “light” and “dark” sides of a mystical “Force” that pervades the universe and, especially, all living things.

The *Stargate* TV series and films portray the deities of ancient peoples as stemming from the intervention of extraterrestrials.

The *Babylon 5* TV series included references to Earth religions and alien religious beliefs.

The TV series *Game of Thrones* showed religions of “The Old Gods,” “The Faith of the Seven” gods, “The Lord of Light,” the “Many-Faced God” and “Drowned God.”

The animated series *Futurama* featured Robotology, Robot Judaism and The First Amalgamated Church.

The genre of science fiction, fantasy and alternative history include a wealth of imagined religions. These include, to cite just a few examples:

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“Fordism,” which reveres mass production and consumption in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. The “Church of Science” in Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* books.

Bokononism, which preaches belief in lies as a way to happiness and peace of mind in Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Cat's Cradle*.

Monism, in Robert Heinlein's novel *Tunnel in the Sky* and The Church of All Worlds in Heinlein's classic *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* features the Earthseed religion that sees ultimate truth, meaning and “God” in the process of change.

Fictional religions borrow elements of traditional religions and some interesting innovations. They can be little more than a background that fills out imagined societies and cultures. More often they are important elements of the storytelling that advance character development, relate to social forces and character motivations integral to the plot and explore religious questions of morality, meaning, love, life and death. Sometimes religion is the main subject of a story, whether extrapolated from current trends or speculation about how religious traditions may interact with social and technological change.

Fiction can become actual religious movements. Examples of this include Jediism, Matrixism (based on the 1999 film and its sequels), Dudeism, The Church of the Latter-Day Dude (based on the 1998 film *The Big Lebowski*), Elven-Otherkin groups loosely based on *The Lord of the Rings*, and Earthseed/Solseed that draw on Butler's *Parable* books. Even the mid-20th Century TV sitcom *Leave It to Beaver* spawned The Church of Beaver Cleaver. How far such movements go depend on the interest they are able to draw and sustain. But even parody religions can gain significant support as in the case of the Church of The Flying Spaghetti Monster (Pastafarianism) and The Satanic Temple which came about in reaction to Creationism and other breaches of state-church separation, respectively.

Significantly, both fiction and religion depend on and are facilitated by communication. Both have grown and proliferated with advances in communication beginning with writing and long-distance travel, the printing press, mass communication technologies and, in recent years, the Internet. In modern observation and study of religions growing out of fiction we gain greater insight into how the more traditional religions must have begun.

All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar, or our meetup page, from which you can RSVP, at: - www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought - JOIN THE NTCOF MEETUP GROUP !!!

Social Luncheon: Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and discussion at the Jason's Deli on MacArthur Blvd just south of I-635, at 7707 N MacArthur Blvd, phone (972) 432-0555.

Freethought Salon: Discuss today's service topic or other conundrums on most non-first Sundays of the month, over breakfast/coffee (or not)(and you can bring whatever you want to eat!), in the atrium – usually towards the back – of the Embassy Suites DFW Airport North – on Bass Pro Drive in Grapevine beginning at 10:00 AM.

Game Night: Most Friday nights at the IHOP on 2310 Stemmons Trail (I-35), near Northwest Highway (Loop 12). Plan to arrive at about 7:30 PM, and stay late playing Imperial 2030, Dominion, Terraforming Mars, Le Havre, Caverna, and other fun games!

Have Another Idea? Email or call! Read bulletins, articles and post on the FORUM under SERVICES at www.churchoffreethought.org LIKE US at [facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/](https://www.facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/) and sign up for our Twitter feed at www.twitter.com/ntcof/ !

PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH “EXPERIMENTS IN THINKING”

> Sunday, April 5, 2020 <
HERE at the Hawthorn Suites
DFW Airport North
at 10:30 AM

THANK YOU !!
FOR YOUR TIME and
FINANCIAL SUPPORT
of the NTCOF !!
**It is needed, appreciated
and Tax-Deductible !**

The North Texas Church of Freethought The Fellowship of Unbelievers

Pastor (It's a job description, not a title!)
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