

Time and Relative Dimensions in Faith

Religion and *Doctor Who*

**Edited by Andrew Crome and James
McGrath**

DARTON · LONGMAN + TODD

This edition first published in 2013 by
Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd
1 Spencer Court
140 – 142 Wandsworth High Street
London SW18 4JJ

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ISBN 978-0-232-53021-6

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Phototypeset by Kerrypress Ltd, Luton, Bedfordshire
Printed and bound by Scandbook AB

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Acknowledgements

Just before he regenerated, David Tennant's Tenth Doctor took the TARDIS on one last trip, thanking all of those who had meant something special to him. These acknowledgements give the editors an opportunity to do something similar. Thanks must first go to David Moloney, Editorial Director at DLT. We are deeply grateful to all the work that David and all at the publisher have put into the volume, and their quick, friendly and remarkably efficient working practice. We would also like to express our thanks to all of our colleagues and students at Manchester and Butler for their interest in the book and being willing to endure our obsession with the show.

All of the contributors to this volume, who have provided such a rich and wide-ranging collection of viewpoints, also deserve special thanks. They have made what could have been a stressful process into one that was hugely enjoyable through their level of insight and willingness to work to deadlines. We would also like to thank all of those who expressed an interest in contributing to this process in its early stages. We were staggered by the response we received when we first floated this project, and hope that all who had an interest in it at that early stage enjoy this book.

A number of other heroic individuals helped in a variety of ways. In particular, Crawford Gribben, Gordon Blows and David Butler have all offered useful advice or material at key moments in this book's development. Jon Ainscough, Stef Elstub, Helen Hardwick and Lizzie Slingsby provided insightful discussions on individual episodes (and lots of tea) during the final editing process. Their contributions to the debate over whether we called this book *Time and Relative Dimension in Faith* (as our inner-fans demanded) or whether to go with (as we eventually did) *Dimensions* were particularly helpful, as were the opinions of Sam Carey and Daniel Rozday as non-fans. The reasoning behind our fan-baiting title is laid out in our introduction.

Finally, our thanks go to our families and friends, and to all those who share a love of *Doctor Who* with us, or have had to endure our addiction. When he was nine years old, Andrew Crome's mother grew so frustrated with her son's obsession that she told him to focus

on learning about something useful ('like history') rather than things like UNIT dating controversies. This book is, in many ways, a (very) belated response to that challenge. In its many forms *Doctor Who* inspires, challenges, excites and asks us important questions about who we are. This book tries to examine, from a variety of perspectives, why *Doctor Who* is so good at asking these questions, and why they continue to appeal to us today. As *Doctor Who* increasingly grows its fanbase (now including Andrew's mum!), this book tries to look at why its appeal is so wide. *Time and Relative Dimensions in Faith* is therefore dedicated to anyone who has ever been moved, thrilled and excited by the Doctor's adventures. As the show celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year, we look forward to seeing exactly where it goes next.

Introduction

Andrew Crome

At one time, generations stood entranced by it. Knowing its key texts and the enemies vanquished by its hero was a part of every English childhood. The stories of demons defeated and people set free; of ordinary men and women swept into a story greater than themselves; of a man who died and was raised from death captivated all those who came across it. Those gatekeepers left in charge of this phenomenon looked out with growing confidence. It would continue to go from strength to strength; it was destined to be embraced by generation after generation. But then, suddenly, interest began to decline. The confidence of an earlier era was revealed to be complacency as those who had shown weekly commitment began to drop away. Children were no longer interested in what (to them at least) appeared dull and dated. Desperate measures aiming to rekindle interest through nostalgia failed miserably. Revamps, modern music, even esoteric clothing were all tried with little effect. And by the early 1990s it seemed dead in the water.

Then something unexpected happened. The most committed followers continued to believe. New texts, different approaches and fresh voices suggested that it could be reimagined for a new century. Unsurprisingly, there were disagreements – how should their hero be represented? What were the acceptable boundaries he could transgress? And, of course, which of his adventures should be considered part of the canon? While the answers to these questions differed, the core followers revealed that they never gave up the faith. And like its hero, quite suddenly, interest began to rise again. The phenomenon was reborn and appeared more alive and relevant than ever. And by 2013, the concept that had been confidently written off as a throwback to a forgotten age twenty years earlier was more visible and influential than ever before.

This is, of course, the story of *Doctor Who*'s triumphant return to our television screens, first in the UK and then across the world. However, it could just as easily be a description of the role of religion in British life, at least according to one recent wide-ranging survey of the subject by a group of sociologists, historians and theologians.¹ Whether you agree with this reading of religion's fortunes in the UK or not (and plenty do not),² *Doctor Who* itself has always contained a rich current of religious themes and ideas at its heart. In its very first episode, the programme asked how humans rationalise the seemingly supernatural, as two snooping school teachers refused to accept that the TARDIS was real ('This is nothing more than a game that you and your grandfather are playing ... but you can't expect us to believe it'). On their travels, Ian and Barbara (now reluctant believers) served as the prototype for the companions who would confront false gods and eternal beings; robot messiahs and strange cults. Above all of this stands the figure of the Doctor himself. The ultimate mystery, beyond time, the force above all those imaginary deities, only *he* has truly experienced the mysteries of creation. As he recently reminded us, he had seen the creation of the universe and its destruction 'until nothing remained, no time, no space, just me'. The Doctor is therefore unique in the universe; the guardian of terrible truths and secrets 'that must never be told, knowledge that must never be spoken, knowledge that will make parasite gods blaze!'³

Time and Relative Dimensions in Faith: Religion and Doctor Who is a collection of academic (but accessible) articles which examines these (and many other) religious themes and ideas within *Doctor Who*, as well as looking at responses to religion in audio adventures, online communities and wider fandom. Much like the TARDIS itself, this book offers a way of exploring a number of different worlds; a variety of communities, philosophies and historical periods. Yet while the TARDIS's initials stand for 'Time and Relative Dimension in Space', studies of religion often suffer by being narrowly confined to particular faith traditions or academic approaches. The worlds of different faiths and faith communities which have used *Doctor Who* are as wide as the universe the Doctor traverses, and this calls for a similarly eclectic approach. This collection therefore examines the history and relative *dimensions* across the landscape of contemporary Religious Studies, Religious History and Theology.

Readers might, of course, be sceptical of the benefits of examining religion and *Doctor Who* side by side. Indeed, at first glance they might appear to have little connection with one another. We are

certainly not suggesting that *Doctor Who* should be viewed as focused *primarily* on religion. Even the editors of this volume do not sit down to watch *Doctor Who* in the expectation that it will deal with deep religious issues – which is not to say that we aren't very pleasantly surprised when it *does* focus on such things! As Robert Pope notes in his work on religion and film, people usually watch movies and shows like *Doctor Who* to be entertained, not to engage with deep philosophical and theological issues. This is an important point which can easily be forgotten in academic work on religion and popular culture. Nonetheless, as Pope's own work shows, just because something exists primarily to entertain, does not mean that religious themes cannot be dealt with in highly complex ways, and those themes later debated, reinterpreted and engaged with in fandom and in wider popular culture.⁴ Indeed, digging a little into *Doctor Who*'s own rich history reveals that different presentations of religion, religious themes and critiques of religious positions have been present in the series from 1963 until the present day. We would therefore suggest that there are a number of reasons for examining religion and *Doctor Who* together.

First, it allows an appreciation of the changing ways in which religion has been presented on British television and in wider popular culture from the 1960s until the present day. *Doctor Who*, with (an admittedly loose) educational remit in its early days, therefore presented images of other cultures to British viewers, inviting them to think through the implications of different behaviours and belief systems. To take one example, the different ways in which Buddhism has been presented in the series suggests something about changing conceptions of non-Christian religion in Britain from the 1960s onwards. The 1964 serial 'Marco Polo', for example, saw the titular explorer suggesting that the TARDIS crew might be Buddhists because of their apparently magical blue box. 'At the Khan's court in Peking, I have seen Buddhist monks make cups of wine fly through the air unaided and offer themselves to the Great Khan's lips', reveals Polo, 'I do not understand it, but I have seen it.' While this might seem to invoke Arthur C. Clarke's 'third law', that advanced technology appears indistinguishable from magic, it in fact offers a subtle modification of this. For Polo, advanced technology appears indistinguishable from religious power.

Buddhism in fact appeared relatively regularly through the series' original run. Patrick Troughton's Second Doctor stopped off at a Tibetan monastery in the 1967 serial 'The Abominable Snowmen'

and encountered the Great Intelligence and robotic Yetis, as well as monks going about their daily routine of meditation and prayer. In Jon Pertwee's final story, 'Planet of the Spiders' (1974), UNIT regular Mike Yates cleared his mind through meditation after a run-in with apocalyptic environmentalists in 'Invasion of the Dinosaurs'. Here, Buddhist practice is no longer semi-magical, as in 'Marco Polo', or restricted to Tibet as in 'The Abominable Snowmen'; we find Tibetan meditation centres have now sprung up in rural England. If the journey of monks from Tibet to the Home Counties might have seemed like a long one for the average viewer in the 1970s, then spare a thought for the Doctor's former mentor, who had journeyed from Gallifrey and lived on Earth as Buddhist Abbot K'Anpo (and, somewhat confusingly, as a projection of his future incarnation Cho-Je). Viewers concerned about the impending regeneration of Pertwee into Tom Baker could be reassured through K'Anpo's wisdom: 'All things pass away, as you will learn in your meditation. This world of samsara, the world of appearance, is the world of change'. Producer Barry Letts, a Buddhist himself, intentionally worked many of these themes through the series in the Pertwee era, but the show also returned to the subject in later years, particularly in Peter Davison's 'Kinda' (1982) and 'Snakedance' (1983), in which scriptwriter Christopher Bailey wove complex Buddhist allegories into his tales of the alien Mara.⁵

To talk about the presentation of Buddhism is merely to scratch the surface of the way in which the series has dealt with religion. The show's science-fiction basis has offered writers and producers opportunities to explore contemporary religious challenges in abstracted contexts. To provide just one example, in 'The Aztecs' (1964), the First Doctor's companion Barbara attempted to change the beliefs of those she encountered when she was mistaken for the god Yetaxa. Written in a Britain that was facing the challenges of increasing immigration, and the resulting clashes between British Christianity and new forms of faith, Barbara's desire to remove 'primitive' aspects from Aztec faith by opposing human sacrifice is perhaps the understandable response of the 'civilised' Westerner confronting an unfamiliar faith. Yet her plan fails when the victim, horrified that he has been denied the honour of serving his god, kills himself to complete the sacrifice. The story contains a warning from the Doctor that attempts to change beliefs without understanding them will lead only to disaster: 'Human sacrifice is their tradition. Their religion. There's nothing we can do about it'.

This was far from the universal position of the series, and *Doctor Who* can also be open about challenging religion. The Doctor certainly doesn't profess any sort of faith himself. Indeed, it is fun to speculate on what would have happened had the planned second serial 'The Masters of Luxor' made it to our screens in 1963. The decision to replace it with 'The Daleks' may have been wise in hindsight, but it tragically denied us not only the worst double entendre in the show's history,⁶ but also the Doctor kneeling in a prayer of repentance and his condemnation of Karl Marx's statement that religion was 'the opium of the masses'. 'I think he was wrong,' notes the Doctor. 'It would have been truer to say, "Religion sneering at scientific progress ... or scientific progress sneering at religion ... either of them can lull people to sleep". Each needs the other.'⁷

In later episodes, *Doctor Who* encourages viewers to confront false belief and reveal its regressive character. Whether this is through the unmasking of false gods (as in 'Pyramids of Mars' (1975) or 'Four to Doomsday' (1982)), the discovery of demonic/alien cults ('The Masque of Mandragora' (1976) and 'Image of the Fendahl' (1977)), or the exploration of the nature of religious faith ('The Curse of Fenric' (1989)), *Doctor Who* suggested that false faith should be revealed wherever it was found. As the Doctor exposes the god Xoanan as nothing more than a computer with a split personality, so he criticises those who refuse to accept his conclusions: 'You know the very powerful and the very stupid have one thing in common. They don't alter their views to fit the facts. They alter the facts to fit the views.'⁸

By the time of the revival of the show in 2005, religion again worked its way through the episodes of the newly popular series. The Daleks, for a long time a purely secular enemy of the Doctor, found faith in their Emperor-God (or, as the Doctor put it, 'They're insane!').⁹ The Tenth Doctor was offered an early chance to become a God ('School Reunion' (2006)), before encountering a society which based its existence on solidarity created through hymn singing ('Gridlock' (2007)). The Eleventh Doctor discovered that the Church of England still exists in the far future as a paramilitary organisation sometimes fighting for him ('The Time of Angels/Flesh and Stone' (2010)); sometimes allying with orders of 'Headless Monks' to battle against him ('A Good Man Goes to War' (2011)). The fact that religion works itself out in this way suggests that it remains a concern of producers, writers and viewers.

This extremely brief overview has merely scratched the surface of the religious themes which have been used by the programme.

Countless other examples could be (and, indeed, are) offered in the course of this book. And here we can move beyond the television series. As fans know, *Doctor Who*'s world is much wider than its televisual context. The vast range of novels – starting with Virgin's *New Adventures* and continuing through the BBC's Eighth Doctor and 'Past Doctor' adventures – provided opportunities for writers to address increasingly complex themes and issues in much greater detail than on television. A similarly deep analysis was possible from 2002 onwards through Big Finish's range of audio plays, of which around 170 have been produced at the time of writing. Plays like Rob Shearman's 'The Holy Terror' therefore acted as open critiques of organised religion in a much more nuanced way than had been possible on television, while Caroline Symcox's 'The Council of Nicaea' allowed the Fifth Doctor and his companions to take part in early Christian debates on the nature of the Trinity. This is before we think about the spin-offs, graphic novels, *Doctor Who Magazine* comic strips, webcasts, and video games. *Doctor Who* is truly a vast transmedia franchise.¹⁰ But merely highlighting examples of religion in *Doctor Who* achieves very little. It is not enough simply to say that religious themes are present; what is important is that we analyse *why* they are present, and what they tell us about the society that produced the show and the viewers who engaged with it.

The writers in this collection therefore attempt to answer these questions through an in-depth analysis of the various treatments of religion throughout every era of the show's history, and through the various media of which it has made use. While the majority of chapters here focus on televisual *Doctor Who*, the authors also look at audios, novels and the response of fandom in their chapters. Their analyses reveal that examining religion in a long-running series such as *Doctor Who* can contribute to a number of key debates within faith communities and religious history. Changes in the level of religious content and the background knowledge that producers assumed viewers would have regarding faith-based themes can offer valuable perspectives on the controversy over the supposed secularisation of British society since the 1960s. With Callum Brown's highly influential study *The Death of Christian Britain* highlighting 1963 as the year in which full-scale secularisation set in, *Doctor Who* presents an obvious tool through which we can examine the outworking and impact of secularisation, if it in fact can be said to have happened at all.¹¹ Indeed, the increasing prevalence of spiritual themes in the revived series, used both positively and negatively, might locate

Doctor Who as part of a wider spiritualised, rather than religious, 'occulture'.¹²

A further advantage to considering religious themes in the programme is that it provides fresh ideas and illustrations for those teaching Religious Studies in universities and schools. As the example from 'The Aztecs' above shows, *Doctor Who* has never shied away from the difficult effects religion has on those who follow it. This is true not only of *Doctor Who*, but also other popular science-fiction programmes and films – we need only think of similar themes running through the various *Star Trek* series or *Battlestar Galactica* to see this. Popular science fiction therefore offers a way in which complex religious and philosophical ideas can be presented to students in such a way that it enables them to see their relevance in contemporary culture, rather than as merely 'academic' questions. One of the aims of this book is to encourage those teaching Religious Studies and related subjects to make fuller use of science fiction in this area, and to explore the ways in which an interaction with popular culture can be used creatively in these studies.

Of course, the question of how these religious themes were received by the audience is as important as the interrogation of the themes themselves. To those on the outside looking in, *Doctor Who* fandom might well appear to be semi-religious in nature, with its debates on canonicity and arguments about whether recent portrayals of its central figure fit with preconceived notions of how the Doctor 'should' behave. A quick glance at the various fan forums available online will reveal a great disparity between different fan reactions to religious themes (and, in fact, everything else) in *Doctor Who*. A search of online fan fiction reveals a number of stories suggesting the Doctor's involvement with the life of Jesus (vying for readers' attention alongside the Doctor/Master slash-fics). Indeed, the idea of a mysterious individual with the ability to die and rise again automatically suggests certain comparisons with Christ. While Christian writers are unlikely to join fan fiction in asking whether Jesus was in fact a disguised Time Lord, they have often co-opted the Doctor as a Christ-figure. Reverend John D. Beckwith, chaplain to the Bishop of Edmonton, wrote in 1972 that while the programme was fiction:

Doctor Who, as a character [*sic*] is essentially a good man and, although even he has his setbacks and the situation often hangs in the balance, Good in the end triumphs over Evil. This is the

most important connection between *Doctor Who* and religion: the recognition that there is one basic Truth in God's Creation and this is that the most valuable and worthwhile thing is GOODNESS.¹³

For others, *Doctor Who* could serve as a more direct tool for understanding faith. This has been even more common since the return of the series to our screens in 2005. 'Does *Doctor Who* feature a God for our times?' asked Stephen Kelly in a 2011 article for *The Guardian's* website, while in 2013 Liel Liebovitz suggested that the Doctor was 'the greatest Jewish character in the history of television ... it's been a very long time since a television show took metaphorical questions so seriously and answered them in a way that was so profoundly Jewish'.¹⁴ At times, these religious readings of the show fired up evangelism. In 2008 the Church of England's 'Church Army' organised a '*Doctor Who* and Spirituality Day', in which fans were encouraged to explore religion through the series.¹⁵ For those ministers present, the day offered a way to connect with popular culture. As Bishop of Sherwood, the Rt Revd Tony Porter commented: '[the conference] is a great idea as *Doctor Who* is hugely popular and it's critical to identify with where people are'. Other attendees took a more literal approach to the subject matter. The Revd Andrew Meyers concluded that 'We saw the Doctor persuaded to save a family of Pompeians in one of the most recent episodes, surely a reference to Genesis and Abraham's bargaining with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah ... Even the more cynical have been convinced that this immensely successful series provides a wonderful toolkit'.¹⁶ Even the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, referred to the series in his preaching, illustrating the dangers of a society built around the wrong kind of fulfilment by quoting the 1987 episode 'The Happiness Patrol' in his 2011 Easter sermon.¹⁷ For Christians wanting to explore theological themes in the show, it was possible to pick up books like Baptist minister Anthony Thacker's *Behind the Sofa*, which used the 2005 and 2006 series as the launch pad for theological and ethical discussions on issues such as sexuality, reincarnation and the occult.¹⁸ This Christian interest in the evangelistic potential of the show reached a bizarre peak in 2007, when Russell T. Davies's 'Gridlock' was nominated for the Epiphany Prize, an award for 'television programs which are wholesome, uplifting and inspirational and which result in a great increase in either man's love of God or man's understanding of

God'.¹⁹ The nomination was withdrawn when the prize committee realised Davies's background was not in line with their interpretation of what constituted family values.

The case of 'Gridlock' is interesting, because Davies later revealed that he explicitly wrote it *against* religion. While initially including the sequence in which a disparate community unites around hymn singing to 'show how good faith could be, regardless of the existence of God', as the production proceeded he revealed that 'the real me came bleeding through, because it transpires that hope stifles the travellers. It stops them acting ... the Doctor realises that no one is going to help them. There is no higher authority'. As he concludes, 'That's what I really think about a ton of things: religion, superstition, mysticism, legends, all bollocks.'²⁰ The Epiphany Prize committee would probably not be amused.

'Gridlock', then, can be taken as a good example of the complex way in which religious themes in popular culture can be reinterpreted by fans. What Davies intended as an anti-religious text becomes, in the hands of those who consume and interact with it, something which in fact promotes their belief. To see how fans have used *Doctor Who* in this way, both to promote and to attack religious positions they either hold to or disagree with, is to see the active reworking of these texts in action. It offers a fascinating window into the way in which fans consume texts, and the way in which religious (or, indeed, anti-religious) communities reinterpret the products of popular culture.

The Book

Time and Relative Dimensions in Faith tries to examine these issues through adopting a number of different methodological approaches across its nineteen chapters. At this point, it is important that we say something about the nature of the approaches taken by the contributors to this book. This volume as a whole does not take a uniform approach to religion. It does not aim either to promote a particular type of religious faith, or to attack any tradition. Some contributors write from a particular faith background, while others approach the subject from an explicitly secularist viewpoint. While each author has certainly been influenced by their particular religious (or non-religious) background, the intention of this collection is to provide a scholarly overview of the many complex uses of religion in *Doctor Who*, rather than to promote any particular form of belief. Reflecting the popularity of *Doctor Who* across the English-speaking

world, contributors are drawn not just from the United Kingdom, but also from the United States and Australia. The approaches used are similarly diverse. Chapters have been written by film scholars and sociologists; theologians and historians; rhetoricians, philosophers and anthropologists. This makes for a diverse collection, which aims to appeal to a broad disciplinary range. While scholars from each of these fields use their own approaches, they have written their essays to be both academically engaging and accessible for fans without specialist knowledge of Religious Studies or Theology. Where technical terms are used, they are explained clearly. This is a book that aims to be, at one and the same time, a valuable academic resource and something that will appeal to fans interested in the issues it raises.

The book is structured into four sections. The first explores religious issues within *Doctor Who* itself. Courtland Lewis opens this by examining the way in which *Doctor Who* has dealt with immortality. Lewis shows how immortality leads the show's characters, from Omega to the Master, to madness and depression. An acceptance of death is always part of *Doctor Who*, and calling on ideas found in a variety of faith traditions and philosophical positions, Lewis shows how we might all benefit from a notion of 'objective' immortality based on the shared memory banks of the Time Lords' 'Matrix'.

Claims that the Doctor represents a messianic figure are among the most popular in works on religion and the show. Gabriel McKee explores them in a creative way as he writes about the Doctor's ethics. Denying that the Doctor can be characterised as either an authoritarian or anti-authoritarian figure, he shows how *Doctor Who* has always looked beyond simple resolutions and dualistic either/or solutions to moral problems. What matters is our ethical and humanist response – if the Doctor is messianic in any way, it is that he shows us how to be truly human.

Continuing the theme of Christ figures, K. Jason Wardley offers a thorough theological reading of Paul Cornell's 'Human Nature', both in its early form as a novel and its 2007 adaptation on screen. Wardley examines the Doctor's *kenosis* (self-emptying) in the story, comparing it to Christ's incarnation and applying the categories of René Girard to analyse the role of mimetic violence in the Doctor's incarnational journey. This, argues Wardley, does not provide an image of the Doctor as a simple analogue of Christ, but allows the viewer/reader a creative exploration of the idea of incarnation.

Tim Jones, meanwhile, offers a stimulating look at the faith that the Doctor inspires through a close reading of two episodes which explore the theme in detail: 'The Curse of Fenric' (1989) and 'The God Complex' (2011). Comparing these episodes offers very different perspectives on faith, and allows Jones to consider the wider changes in British attitudes to religion between the airing of the two episodes.

Michael Charlton examines time in his chapter, making use of rhetorical and theological concepts of Chronos ('clock time') and Kairos ('God's time') to explore how the Doctor has faced his own moments of decision and judgement when facing the challenges of time travel. In an accomplished analysis, Charlton examines the differing treatment of the theme in 'The Waters of Mars' (2009) and 'A Christmas Carol' (2010), as the Doctor falls foul of the laws of time in one episode, while seemingly re-writing them in the other.

The section closes with Brigid Cherry's chapter, which offers a detailed reading of Martha Jones's story arc in the 2007 series of the show. While acknowledging the difficulties of reading the Doctor as a Christ-figure, Cherry shows the way in which Martha's story can be read as apostolic. As she concludes, Martha's agency is restored at the end of her story arc, a significant 'development for a black female character in popular culture'.

In the second section of the book we turn to look at the way in which religion has been used to deal with encounters with the unfamiliar and the alien in *Doctor Who*. Laura Brekke's chapter examines the way in which the uniqueness of humanity has been dealt with in post-2005 *Doctor Who*. Taking an explicitly theological approach, Brekke argues that the Doctor's conception of 'humanness' is not tied to *Homo sapiens* alone. Rather, it is based on ideas of empathy and emotions which are equally applied to aliens. Where these qualities are lacking – in Cybermen and Daleks for example – so is humanness. Indeed, Brekke argues, the image of God is itself denied through the removal of these qualities.

Taking a different approach, Jennifer L. Miller asks whether we can view *Doctor Who* as saying something about humanity's capacity for turning evil. While acknowledging a potentially messianic reading of the Doctor in the post-2005 series, Miller argues that we are perhaps more justified in viewing the Doctor as a representation of the monstrous. Employing Freud's notion of the uncanny to explore the way in which Christian imagery was used in Russell T. Davies's tenure as Executive Producer, she presents a reading of the Doctor's character which sees him as more bestial than divine.

Searching for figures representing both 'otherness' and (mis)representing the divine, we can turn to many false gods or 'Celestials' who appear in the series. John Vohlidka looks at the way in which God-like beings were represented in the 1970s and early 1980s era of the programme. While on occasion seen as positive messianic figures, he finds on the whole an attack on those who falsely claimed divinity. Such attacks are not necessarily symptomatic of the secularisation of society, but as Vohlidka argues, had always been a part of the Christian tradition. The presentations of these 'Celestials' in this manner therefore suggests the strength of a form of diffusive Christianity in British culture in the 1970s and 80s.

Kieran Tranter develops this in a chapter which demonstrates the way in which *Doctor Who* has constantly shown an antipathy towards divinity throughout its history. Reading *Who* through H. G. Wells and Thomas Huxley, he shows the way in which the show helps provide us with a model of how to live as humans in a universe without divinity.

Karma Waltonen, meanwhile, turns to the question of how cults and their ethical positions have been portrayed in post-2005 *Doctor Who*. From Pompeii to the Cult of Skaro, brainwashing, blind belief and unquestioning obedience are condemned on the show. But what, asks Waltonen, of the cult of the Doctor? What are the implications of his ethics for those who follow him? Her chapter presents a stimulating analysis of the ethics of the programme, teasing out ambiguities and challenges to the viewer.

Science has often been seen as one of religion's many 'Others', especially in the popular image of a conflict between science and faith. David Johnson argues that science-fiction television provides an abstracted way for contemporary society to address controversial issues of science and religion. Looking in detail at this issue in *Doctor Who*, he finds the Doctor plays the role of a mediator, who is capable of building bridges between those who rely purely on science and those who believe in the supernatural. Such a mediator, he concludes, is exactly what we long for today in disputes between science and belief.

Closing this section, Kristine Larsen applies a fascinating Buddhist reading of the Tennant years to explore themes of loss, karma and death in the revived series. Using the work of Tsong-kha-pa, she offers a rich analysis of the way in which key themes in Tennant's episodes reflect Buddhist concerns, highlighting strengths and weaknesses in the Doctor's character as she does so.

The book's penultimate section then turns towards the question of what *Doctor Who* can tell us about the religious positions of the society it was produced in, and the utility of using the programme in its historical context. Andrew Crome's chapter looks at the way in which apocalyptic ideas can be explored through *Doctor Who*. He finds that apocalyptic fears can reveal much about wider cultural concerns at times when episodes were produced, and that the often playful treatment of apocalypse can serve to reveal some of the ambiguities and challenges of apocalyptic thought itself. For those teaching courses on the apocalyptic thought or British religious history, *Doctor Who* is therefore seen to be a useful tool through which to engage students.

Alexander Cummins examines the way in which magic has been portrayed in the programme. Looking at 'The Dæmons' (1971), 'Battlefield' (1989), and 'The Shakespeare Code' (2007), he emphasises the similarities and differences between magical practice on screen and in historical practice. While magic is often portrayed as a primitive interpretation of technology in science fiction (as per Clarke's third law), Cummins shows an increasingly nuanced approach to the subject in *Doctor Who*, which culminates in the subtle presentation of the subject in 'The Shakespeare Code'.

Marcus Harnes, meanwhile, considers different portrayals of the Church of England in the Russell T. Davies and Stephen Moffat eras. Whereas Davies's episodes featured the Church both literally and metaphorically under attack, Moffat portrays a reconstructed, active and militarised (if theologically vague) Church of England. Reading this through Iris Murdoch's novel *The Time of the Angels*, Harnes offers important insights into the way religion is portrayed in *Doctor Who*, and the institutional Church is seen in science fiction in general.

Taking a more contemporary view, Russell Sandberg poses one of the most interesting questions in this volume – Could *Doctor Who* actually become a religion? Sandberg answers this question as a scholar of religion and law, asking whether belief in concepts found in *Doctor Who* would be considered as religious under the UK's 'Equality Act' of 2010. The result is a fascinating tour of the case law that will appeal not just to fans of the show, but to all who are interested in law and religion.

The book draws to a close by looking outwards towards fandom and the audio adventures of the Doctor. Noel Brown examines the way *Doctor Who* audio dramas have dealt with religion. Although sometimes seen as primarily based in nostalgia, Brown shows how

a number of Big Finish's earlier audio plays – 'The Holy Terror' and 'Bloodtide' – explore religious issues in a critical and controversial manner. Both plays construct a positive image of secularism through showing its ethical nature and poetic capabilities, while attacking the dangers of religious fundamentalism.

Joel Dark's chapter closes the book by exploring the way in which fans reacted to the cancellation of *Doctor Who* in 1989 through an imaginative engagement with its world. The novels and audios produced in the 1990s and early 2000s showed a creative exploration of hidden voices and continuity issues found in the original televisual material, creating new texts overflowing with different approaches to the programme. Dark argues that these approaches reflect the rabbinic process of Midrash, in which biblical texts are creatively interrogated and reimagined. This is a useful approach to non-televisual *Doctor Who*, and Dark's chapter will be of interest to all examining how fans engage with televisual worlds.

Throughout this book, *Doctor Who* episodes have been referenced simply by their titles and the year of their production. Early serials, which included different episode names for each individual instalment, have therefore been referred to using the serial title as a whole, rather than their individual titles (the episode 'World's End' is therefore referred to as 'The Dalek Invasion of Earth', Part one). Those interested in full details of the writer and director of each episode will find them included in the Appendix at the end of this book.

In summary, this collection is designed to enhance our understanding of how religion interacts with popular culture; how people make use of science fiction in their religious practice and what religious themes in this culture say about secularisation. Most importantly, it provides another way of looking at why *Doctor Who* continues to inspire, to engage and to excite generations of passionate fans, whatever their position on faith. Whether the reader of this book is an academic looking at contemporary religion or a fan wanting to explore the themes and history of the show they love, we hope that *Time and Relative Dimensions in Faith* will prove stimulating, thought provoking, and exciting reading.