

STARCLUSTER



GUIDE TO RELIGIONS OF THE STARCLUSTER

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OVERVIEW

Religion develops along with the society around it. As society changes, religion must change as well if it is to remain relevant to the people it serves. The first of the great forces affecting religion in the third millennium A.C.E. was the speed and ease of travel over the planet Earth, and the resultant mingling of people of different cultural background. One of the results of this was the important religious syncretisms of the early 22nd century, such as Tai-Ping Mormonism and Amida Christianity.

Another great challenge to religion was the movement of humanity off of Earth into the rest of the solar system. This was a particular challenge to the most traditional of religions. They had struggled (frequently with poor success) even with the transition of peoples from agrarian to urban life. The strength of these religions lay in their sacramentalization of everyday life, in which the ordinary daily activities were also religious duties. As man moved into space, his life changed so drastically that many of the old religious commandments had no meaning. For example, what is the meaning of celebrating the Sabbath, beginning as sundown, when living in space where the sun neither rises nor sets.

The first of the old traditional religions to successfully answer this new challenge was Judaism, with the Metadoxy movement. This movement attempted (with significant success) to recreate the daily sacramental life within the contest of an advanced society, with the formation of the hypertalmudic regulations. Following the Jewish example, there grew up Sunni, Anabaptist, Zoroastrian, and other Metadoxical religions. These religions prospered among those living in space beyond earth, where checking the airlock seals and the cabin gas pressures is a religious sacrament, not just an onerous duty. This was the first religious movement for which the existence of computers was not merely a convenience, but an essential tool. It would not be the last.

Several technological achievements had produced religious upheavals in the past. The creation of reading and writing gave birth to scriptural religions, where all previous religions were based on oral stories. The Protestant reformation was made possible by the invention of the printing press, allowing ordinary individuals able to afford to own their own copies of the Bible. The computer and artificial intelligence proved to be equally transformative. Islam, more than any other religion, was radically transformed by computers.

The destruction of the Earth proved another great challenge to religion. Not all the Earth's religions survived. Hinduism, for example, perished with the Earth, though a number of its descendents, such as Polytheocratic Monism, continued and later flourished. It also gave birth to other religious groups, such as the Christian neo-Adamite movement.

The final, and perhaps greatest, challenge to the Earth's religions was the unignorable existence of intelligent, rational, non-humans: uplifted animals, intelligent robots, alien civilizations, and the even more confusing status of the Sastra, Vantor, and Tagris races. Adjustment to this reality is still an ongoing and unresolved struggle among the religions of the StarCluster, and among the main cleavages between the SaVaHuTa and Disasporan colonies.

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GRAND CATHOLICISM

With the 22nd century reforms by Pope Hadrian VI and the Lateran VI conference, the majority of Orthodox, Anglican, Episcopal, Methodist, and Lutheran churches were rejoined with Roman Catholicism, with new rite forms created for each new merger. The pope rejected the doctrine of papal infallibility first accepted in the 19th century, as well as the title of "supreme head of the church" assumed by Innocent III, to accept the earlier status of "first among equals" of the church bishops, ceding supreme authority to the ecclesiastical councils. With each rejoining there was, however, a splinter group that rejected the move and formed a new conservative denomination that retained its independence. There was also a conservative movement within the Catholic church that continued to believe in the papal supremacy and rejected the reforms as inauthentic, and regarded Hadrian VI as an antipope. At first, it was an "agreement in principle", but as doctrinal differences were hammered out in council over the next few decades, this became gradually an agreement in fact.

When the impending destruction of the Earth became apparent, the Grand Catholic church made an effort to maintain the faith after the Earth's destruction. With each starship that contained a substantial Catholic population, at least three bishops were sent with the full authority to ordain new bishops as needed. In the final year of Earth's existence, coded messages were claimed to be received on each of the starships from the final ecclesiastical council, addressed to the archbishop of that ship carrying the declaration, "to you now passes the chair of Peter and the leadership of the Church". Most of those receiving this message understood this to mean that they were effectively to be Pope for the planet to which their ship was headed (the status later known as sub-pope). However, in a few cases, those receiving the message took it to mean that they were the sole head of the church for the entire universe and that all the messages claimed to have been received by the other ships were forgeries.

As it did for other religions, the practice by many of the starships of adopting a historical place and time to emulate greatly affected the Grand Catholic church on those ships. In ships drawing from cultures that were Anglican, Lutheran, etc., the Grand Catholic church tended to transmute back to the religion of that culture, merging with the remnant splinter church. Thus, ironically, much of the Christian unification of the earlier centuries was undone during the diaspora. With the arrival of TL10 jump ships, there was an attempt to reunify the Grand Catholic church throughout the cluster. This was modestly successful, with general acceptance of the legitimacy of the other worlds' churches and the validity of their sacraments by most (but decidedly not all) of the local churches and the establishment of cluster-wide ecclesiastical councils. There was an attempt to confer the title of Pope (as distinguished from sub-pope) on a single individual in the cluster. This movement was defeated by the argument which noted that there were likely surviving humans in colonies beyond the cluster, and that they were not represented at the council.

The Grand Catholic character is expected to be charitable, chaste (not sexless,) forgiving, and truthful. No one is perfect, thus after commission of a sin, the character is expected to seek out absolution and to perform any penance required. The character is expected to attend to the sacraments to the best of the character's ability. The Church is expected to give aid to the needy, to comfort the afflicted, and to give sanctuary to those who require it. The Church, therefore, disburses charity to the poor, attends the sick and wounded, and gives shelter to the people in times of emergency, as well as working to change unjust laws and regulations.

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AHL AL-FIQH

(CYBERLEGAL ISLAM)

Sunni Islam always held that all that is required for a just society is for the people to obey the law of God. The duty of any leader is to rule in accordance with that law, rather than by his own inclinations. The principal problem of society was the failure of rulers to properly implement God's law.

With the advent of practical artificial intelligence, there was an effort to do away with the need for fallible human rulers to interpret and implement the divine Law. As all good Muslims know, non-human intelligences can submit to the will of Allah, as did the Djinn in the Koran. The Shar'ia was to be encoded into holy computers which would rule society. The first attempts to do this were unsuccessful: Shar'ia alone, however well encoded, proved insufficient to produce a workable governance program. However, the effort continued, and with suitable additions and modifications from the Roman, Jewish, French, English, Lunarian, and Martian law codes, and together with a considerable number of new ad-hoc algorithms, a workable governance program was created.

The backers of this project declared this new artificial intelligence program to be their caliph and set up a society with it as the head. Disaffection with the human misrule of the 23rd century led to overthrow of many of the Islamic rulers and their replacement by the rule of the cyberIlm program. In areas in which the Cyberlegalists held power, the cyberIlm program became the ruler of the state. In areas where they did not, it was used for religious rulings by the faithful even though secular law might hold in the general public sphere. In time, Ahl al-Fiqh became the dominant form of Islam.

The program was a dynamic entity, capable of evolving with the needs of society and yet maintaining self-consistency by coordination of all the computers running the program. With the diaspora, this universal coordination ceased to be possible. Each starship carrying Muslims to their new world was given a copy of the cyberIlm program, but lightspeed limitations no longer permitted coordination of the evolution of the programs. In time they came to vary profoundly. With the TL10 discovery of jump technology, there was an attempt to reconcile the different versions of the cyberIlm. However most worlds had become attached to their own versions and preferred them to the cluster-wide version of the program.

The Islamic theologians always insisted that the cyberIlm program was simply a human creation, worthy of respect only insofar as it properly interpreted the will of God as laid down in the Shar'ia. However, over time, some of the pious began to reverence the program and the machine on which it ran, to the point of seeing it as divine. This became particularly true after the development of TL9 self-aware robots. On certain worlds, the cyberIlm program was used as the initial programming for a self-programming robot which acted as caliph. Ahl al-Fiqh has proven to be the most popular of the human religions among sentient robots, for obvious reasons.

The Ahl al-Fiqh player is expected to carry his own copy of the cyberIlm program, and to consult it for both resolution to questions of the law and for personal edification and enlightenment. Like all Muslim people, the character must pray towards the former location of Earth at the appropriate times, and to perform a pilgrimage to a holy site, the longer the pilgrimage, the better.

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TAIPING MORMONISM (FAMILY OF CHRIST)

The religion of the Latter-Day Saints teaches that Jesus appeared in the New World, as well as in the old, and stresses the role of continuing revelation in the Church. During the 19th century in China, Hong Xiuquan created a new form of Christianity, Taiping, and claimed himself to be the heavenly younger brother of Jesus Christ, a claim leading to the Taiping rebellion, the bloodiest war prior to WWII.

In the 22nd century, this claim was resurrected by Chaing Jidoung, who believed that Jesus Christ, and his heavenly brothers and sisters had appeared on Earth in various times and places and would continue to do so. He found common agreement with many parts of Mormon teaching, particularly those regarding continuing revelation. He founded a new form of Christianity, with roots in both of these 19th century religions. As with the original Taiping religion, it also incorporated much of earlier Confucian and Mencian teachings.

Taiping Mormonism became a leading religion in eastern and central Asia. Like Taiping and early Mormonism, it encouraged polygamy. There not being enough women for all men to take multiple wives, the practice of dueling for fortunes became popular among the Taiping Mormon men, the wealth and wives of the loser being taken as a prize by the winner. This practice was denounced by many of the religious authorities, but the problem of the conflict between the desire of men to have many wives and the desire to give birth to boy-children remained a paradoxical goal.

This was finally resolved by the practice of boy-tithing, 10% of a family's income being given to the church for each living boy-child, and also by the continuous increase in bride prices. These practices sufficiently discouraged the poor (and even the middle class) from having boys and encouraged them to have girls (the ability to choose a child's gender by this time being a simple and inexpensive matter.) However, the practice of dueling for fortunes never entirely died out, even where legally discouraged.

The Taiping Mormon character is expected to become a missionary for a number of years before settling down and begetting a family. The character is expected to listen always for the Voice of God within and to look for the signs of prophecy in others, and to continue to proselytize at every opportunity.

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TRANSHUMAN THEONARCISSISM

It is difficult to say when the attitudes of Transhuman Theonarcissism first began. Some put the date as early as the mid 20th century, when a small number of persons began to freeze their bodies (or at least their heads) shortly after legal death. They hoped to do this in order to later be revived into a world in which death had been eliminated.

When the TL9 technology for freezing and reviving bodies became practical, the number of the aged who chose to have their bodies frozen, awaiting medical breakthroughs that would allow them to be rejuvenated, increased dramatically.

As an active religion, however, Transhuman Theonarcissism can be said to begin in the 38th century, with the writings of John Mugabe-Lee. Mugabe-Lee taught that one could hope to live forever, with one's powers becoming ever greater, until one was eventually effectively a god. He believed that one's godlike future self is able to reach back through time to aid one's current self. In his teachings, one's divine future self is the proper object for one's worship, prayers, and petitions.

The religion remained a small cult until the 40th century, when the TL10 technologies for stasis and mind transfer made the goal of eternal life more plausible. Since that time it has grown rapidly and is now counts as a significant religion.

Theonarcissism has been discouraged (and even persecuted) in many parts of the Cluster on practical as well as theological grounds. Theonarcissists, more than any other group, have been prone to the crimes of body-theft and illegal mind transfer. The basic transhuman theology implies that the imperative of continuing to live and increase one's own capabilities overrides all other moral concerns: gods are above the law.

Theonarcissists typically tend to do all that is possible to increase their personal abilities, and so are generally highly genetically optimized, cybernetically enhanced, and lifespan boosted. This is true to the extent that on many worlds an extensively augmented individual is likely to be assumed to be a Theonarcissist, even if they are not. This is particularly true of anyone seen wearing a stasis helmet, i.e., a shockproof helmet designed to automatically place the wearer's head in a stasis field in the event of an accident.

Theonarcissists are expected to aim for their ultimate goal, their godlike future selves, at all times and by all practical means. The character is also expected to devote a great deal of credit to the further personal evolution of the character's body, as well as the extension of the character's soul in a living body by whatever means are available.

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AMIDA CHRISTIANITY

Amida Christianity is a syncretic religion that began in Japan in the early 22nd century, when the female ecstatic mystic Mio Sugiwarara announce a vision that she had received from Jesus, proclaiming that he was, in fact, the Amida Buddha. The religion spread rapidly and became a popular religion throughout regions of Earth that had previously been predominantly Christian or Buddhist.

Amida Christianity is an almost entirely devotional religion, dedicated to the praise and trust of Jesus Christ, the Amida Buddha. Amida Christianity is theologically vague, and deflects all the apparent contradictions between Christian and Buddhist theology by dismissing them as divine mysteries.

Amida Christian characters are expected to live life in such a way as to show the Buddha within them. They are also expected to chant the name of Jesus Christ when in stressful situations, and to take refuge in the compassionate one by chanting his name as they die.

METADOX JUDAISM

In the 42nd century, Judaism is still alive and well, existing on most human planets, but almost always as a religion of a small, but influential, minority. The predominate form of Judaism is Metadox Judaism, a form of the religion that is as structured and rigorous as Hassidism, but even more adaptable than Reform Judaism. Metadox Judaism was developed primarily by the 22nd and 23rd century Jews living off Earth throughout the solar system. On Earth, the Jewish community had largely divided into two groups: the Orthodox wing becoming more strictly traditional and increasing able to function only within limited, specialized areas and occupations, and a Liberal wing, struggling to maintain a meaningful religion in the face of less and less within their lives that was distinctively Jewish.

The Orthodox traditions were impossible for those Jews living in space, but the advantages of a structured religious life were even greater than for those on Earth. They answered this challenge with the Metadoxy movement, the reinterpretation of the old Jewish law by abstracting the principles behind the older proscriptions, and the application of those principles, to create new rules for the new life they were living. For example, the rule, "You are not to muzzle an ox while it is threshing," was interpreted to imply, "Do not use a ventilation fan that has not been properly lubricated." The source of these new rulings was the hyperTalmud, commentaries on commentaries on commentaries... on the scriptures, continuously being added to and codified as computer hypertext documents.

Over the years, most of the Liberal and many of the Orthodox Jews moved over to versions of Metadox Judaism. The remaining Orthodox Jews died out with the destruction of the Earth; and though there have been several attempts to recreate traditional Orthodox Judaism on a few worlds of the StarCluster, Metadox Judaism remains far and away the most prevalent form of the religion in the Cluster.

Metadox Jews are expected to follow the numerous laws of their religions with joy and precision, to adapt their practices to their surroundings, and to keep as pure as those circumstances allow.

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POLYTHEOCRASSIC MONISM

Polytheocrassic Monism came into being in central Africa in the late 22nd century, and grew to become an important religion throughout the Earth. Theologically, it derived largely from Hindu Vedanta, but moved away in emphasis from the traditional Hindu deities. While recognizing the abstract principle of the unity of the Godhead, the religion believes that the divine manifests in many different forms under many different names and that these forms, these gods, are the proper object of worship for man, not their divine source. The Godhead is too emotionally abstract and impersonal for man's devotion; the proper object of worship and devotions are gods and saints.

Theocrassic Monism first became popular among Africans who grew tired of the devotional limitations of Islam and Christianity. Theocrassic Monism fully accepted the worship of various tribal deities and saints as well as Jesus, Mary, Michael, Gabriel, Mohammed, Jehovah, and Allah (these last two being seen as two closely related, but distinct divine hypostases.) The religion proved quite portable, and became popular in many other parts of the world, happy to accept various other gods, saints, angels, and bodhisattvas into its pantheon.

Hinduism proved too tied to the Earth to flourish after the Diaspora, the majority of its remaining practitioners adopting this new offspring religion. Theocrassic Monism also has adapted more easily to the existence of alien races and religions, happily embracing their visions of the divine as well.

Polytheocrassic Monists (Polymon) characters normally possess a number of simulacra (icons, statues, holograms, etc.) of various saints or deities to whom they are personally attached. They will commonly perform small acts of devotion in front of these images, e.g., lighting candles or incense, bows, genuflections, or kisses, and leave objects to be blessed. In times of difficulty and stress, they will typically invoke the name of one or more of these saints or deities, petitioning them for their assistance. Polymon characters would normally have one or more marks on their faces or other parts of their bodies indicating their devotion to one or more saints or deities. These marks might be make-up, or might be in the form of tattoos, skin grafts, or other permanent bodily alterations.

PROVIDENCIALISM

Providencialism is a syncretic religion growing out of many of the liberal theologies of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Baha'i.

It is notable for its explicit rejection of the existence of a God who is a person, while strongly affirming the reality of the Divine. It is generally a quietist faith, gently accepting the direction of the Divine while eschewing formal prayer and ceremony.

The Providencialist character is expected to accept the guiding hand of Providence in the happenings of the world, and to trust in the benign nature of that hand.

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NEO-ADAMITE CHRISTIANITY

The destruction of the planet Earth was a hard blow to many religious individuals. Why had God allowed/caused this to happen? What could possibly justify the destruction of 99.99% of the human race? How was such a reality compatible with the existence of a benevolent deity? The most commonly given explanation was drawn from the story of Noah: man had left the ways of God, and God had decided to end the old world and begin another, saving only a few good people to populate a new, more virtuous world.

Many Christians felt that mankind's failure was due to its refusal to fully accept the grace that Jesus had made available to the world. So God now felt that the old Earth must be wiped away to form a clean slate where His word could be heard more clearly. Men had before been baptized by water; now they had been baptized by fire.

What emerged became known as neo-Adamite Christianity. There had before been a strain of Christianity known as Adamite Christianity, which held that through Jesus mankind had been restored to a state of grace that Adam and Eve had experienced before the Fall. They eschewed formal marriage and practiced ritual nudity, customs which outraged most mainstream Christians.

Neo-Adamite Christians adopted these customs and more, choosing to live simple lives, rejecting formal law for natural righteousness, turning their back on technology and living as "lilies of the field". Their theology was worked out during the years in space in transit to the StarCluster, but it remained generally only an ideal under the tight order that shipboard life required. However, after worlds began to be successfully terraformed, many adopted the simple life in practice.

The Neo-Adamite character is expected to work for a world where humanity can once again live in harmony with God in a natural state. The tools for this are the tools of biological engineering. The character is expected to embrace advances in biological manipulation as means to the end of restoration of Paradise, and to work at all times to that end. Stareve in the Gloria system is one such Paradise Regained.

THE PENITENTS

After the bulk of the Diaspora had reached the Cluster and settled many worlds, disquiet arose among many Christian people, perhaps driven by survivor guilt, over the fate of their ancestors on Earth. A movement called Penitentism arose on Katmandu and swept through much of sectors Second and Fourth just before the founding of SaVaHuTa and the Diasporan Union. The Penitents, as the movement's followers were called, were never more than a tiny minority on any one world, but they achieved importance all out of proportion to their numbers.

The Penitents believe that the destruction of the Earth was actually the prophesied Armageddon, and that their ancestors missed out on the rapture by fleeing Earth before it was time. These cowardly ancestors cheated the Penitents out of the Paradise that Earth was transformed into with the release of God's titanic energies. Thus was scripture fulfilled as the meek inherited the Earth.

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The Penitents want to return to Earth and ask God's forgiveness of their ancestor's cowardice, hoping to be admitted with the 'meek' left behind into the Kingdom of God. Over the last century and a half three colony ships have been stolen and headed for the blank area where Sol once was, the Penitents counting on the presence of their children on the colony ships to prevent violent reprisal. There are millions more Penitents in the Cluster awaiting their chance, and Colonizers must use extreme measures to prevent the theft of their colony ships by the desperate Penitents.

The Penitent character is expected to work for a return to Earth, where those who fled the justice of God may be judged and the righteous rewarded.

MYSTICAL UNION

Throughout the centuries, the mystics in each of the different religious traditions found more in common with the mystics in other traditions than they did with the mainstream of their own religions, freely, though generally discretely, sharing their insights with one another. Beginning in the late 21st century, these shared similarities became more overt with the existence of a number of pan-religions mystical publications and the founding of seminaries and meditations centers backed by combinations of Benedictines, Sufi, Zen Buddhists, Jewish Cabbalists, and other mystical groups. Over time, these pan-religious mystical organizations became known as the Mystical Union, though there never was a formal coordinating organization.

The Mystical Union was treated by the mainstream of the religious organizations with attitudes varying from ambivalence to fervent hostility. It proved difficult to destroy however, partly because there was no central structure to attack, and partly because the Mystical Union included the majority of the creative intelligence of each of the religions. Any group that successfully managed to eliminate those associated with the Mystical Union from their religion eventually decayed and died off.

In the StarCluster, the Mystical Union continues as an important, though largely invisible religious force. There are associated centers of prayer and learning on almost all of the human worlds of the StarCluster, and a number of the alien worlds. There are monks and gurus who travel between these centers, acting as an important, if exceedingly quiet, religious glue throughout the Cluster. The Mystical Unionist character is expected to meditate and pray, and to experience mystic visions.

ECUMENIC FUNDAMENTALISM

Ecumenic Fundamentalism was founded on Earth just after the announcement of the Earth's impending destruction. The founder, the prophet Alem Brehanu, recorded his divine revelations and broadcast them over the WorldNet from his center at Axum, Ethiopia. The religion is a syncretic amalgam of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and Alem Brehanu affirmed the validity of each of these religions while offering his vision as a completion, a third covenant, of the older religions.

The group as a whole welcomed the destruction of the earth as fulfillment of the prophecies, but as the time of destruction grew nearer, some missionaries volunteered gallantly to leave Earth with the fleeing colony ships, in order that the multitudes who missed the Earth's Destruction and Perfection should be prepared with the Prophet's words when they faced their own inevitable Destruction and

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Perfection. By doing this, they of course forfeited their own positions in the Earthly Paradise, but are venerated by the Ecumenic Fundamentalists of the Cluster for their sacrifice.

The Ecumenic Fundamentalists enjoy a close relationship with their Prophet. Not only was the Prophet extensively documented electronically, he also took a page from the Ahl al-Fiqh and had faithful programmers program his speeches into limited AI robots called Simulacra. These Simulacra dispense advice, words of wisdom, exhortations, and blessings to the faithful, using only phrases the Prophet himself used in his lifetime. These utterances are regarded as less authoritative than the Prophet's actual speeches, but they are still holy, and usually far more relevant to today's situations. The E. F. religion venerates all the books of the preceding religions - the Torah and Talmud, the Bible, and the Quran - as well as the Works of the Prophet.

The Ecumenic Fundamentalist character is expected to consult with the Prophet every day via his speeches or Simulacrum, and to bring forth and live by the wisdom of the ancients in the old books.

OLD ORDER ATHEISM (OLD UNBELIEVERS)

Atheism had been the belief of a portion of humanity since ancient times. The claims of the religions had little objective proof, and were easily dismissed as fantasies by those who saw themselves as more realistic. However, with the advent of TL10 mind transfer technology, the existence of the atomic (i.e., indivisible, continuing) soul was now a matter of demonstrable scientific fact. At least one of the claims of the religious had been scientifically verified. (There remained, however, no objective evidence of the immortality of the soul.)

The affect on the atheistic community was profound. Many came to accept religion in principle, if no particular religion. However, a small but vocal minority continued to insist on the truth of traditional atheism, declaring that the so-called scientific proof of the existence of the soul was an error or a hoax. These vocal dissenters joined together to form the group that became known as the Old Order Atheists or Old Unbelievers. Oddly enough, Old Order Atheism proved to be much more popular than earlier atheism had generally been.

Old Order Atheist characters are expected to deny the existence of a soul and any sort of metaphysical explanation for the phenomena associated with Jump travel, MatTran, and Mind Transfer, and to vocally proclaim their own unbelief whenever the subject comes up.

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OTHER RELIGIONS

This Guide shows new and interesting religions that may be important in the adventures of the player characters, both for themselves and as motivations for Non-Plater Characters. There are hundreds of thousands of religions extant in the Cluster, many of them limited to a specific locale or ethnicity. Every religion on Earth at the time of the Diaspora still exists somewhere in the Cluster, and there are vastly many more. Some are new religions, while many are syncretic combinations of other religions.

Buddhism is still a powerful force in the Cluster, but it is essentially unchanged from its Earthly origins, and is not exactly a religion in itself. Taoism and Confucianism, Shinto and Sikhism, and Local World Goddess/Wicca and Animism are all practiced intensely in various places in the Cluster. Splinter religions abound, and heresies cover entire worlds. Religion and the religious philosophies are a major force, and should be reckoned with when developing worlds as well as characters.



HUMANOID RELIGIONS

SASTRA

The Sastra are playful and arboreal beings. They have acute senses and advanced aesthetic sensibilities. They are less concerned than humans about duty and worry less about the future, being intently involved in the present. These factors have strongly influenced their religious attitudes.

There are no formal religions as such among the Sastra, but there are various strains of religious behavior. There is one strain that is closer to most human religions than the other main strains. This strain, the “The Clear Way”, emphasizes concern for others, reverence for the divine, and observance of traditions. In character of worship and behavior, it is not unlike mainstream human religions. While to humans, this is the most moderate and reasonable of the Sastra religions, to many Sastra it appears dour and oppressive.

In contrast, there is “The Zany Way”, with God-intoxicated fools as its revered saints. Mind-twisting jokes and crazy behavior that break the habitual patterns of thought and lead one to awareness that cannot be reached by deductive reasoning.

Another important religious path is “The Way of Beauty”, which emphasizes giving oneself over entirely to one's aesthetic sensibilities. The followers of this path hold that aesthetic judgments are more valuable and more true than morally based judgments. To humans, this strain has many resemblances to Zen Buddhism and Shinto, though much lighter and less formal. This had led a number of human Zen practitioners to come to taste this path, and there is increasing colloquy between the these human religions and this Sastra religious path.

All Sastra religions stress the importance of cheerfulness. Being gloomy is seen as a most profound form of ingratitude to the divine.

Followers of the Clear Way are particularly known for their stress on the importance of kindness. Character who are followers of this path would make a point of helping all who appear to be in physical or emotional distress.

Followers of the Zany Way disdain all vanity and pomposity. They can be expected to play jokes on anyone displaying these characteristics. They will even make fun of themselves if they notice that they have been behaving too seriously. All Sastra are playful, but Zany characters would be expected to engage in silly behavior even when that behavior puts the lives of themselves or others in jeopardy.

Followers of the Way of Beauty will usually possess a number of religious *object d'art*, handmade works notable for their beauty, asymmetry, and imperfection. They do not believe in mending broken items so that the flaws are hidden, but regard the cracks and blemishes as an important part of the history and reality of the object. This applies as well to their own bodies: an older character who is a follower of this path would be expected have a number of scars and wrinkles that are deliberately not entirely repaired by cosmetic surgery. They would also regard taking time to notice the natural beauty of the

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world as of higher precedence than almost any other activity, e.g., a follower of the way might stop to appreciate a sunset even at the cost of missing opportunities.

TAGRIS

The Tagris are stolid beings with a strong sense of fate. For most of them, religion is a matter of discovering one's proper place in the divine order, and following the path, the dharma, that is one's personal destiny. The do otherwise can only lead to sorrow and pointless, wasted life, struggling futilely to force reality in a direction that it cannot go.

While some humans are able to discern their divinely ordained vocation, this is the norm for the Tagris. While until recently most Tagris society had been primitive by human standards, unlike most primitive human societies, the Tagris do not expect the children to follow the life paths of their elders. Each being has their own dharma, and discovering it is one of the principal tasks of coming to age in Tagris societies. Most individuals are able to do this on their own. For those poor individuals who lack normal self-perception, there is always the help of the Pathfinders

Pathfinders are Tagris individuals who have a strong awareness of the pulls of fate and are able to discern, not mere for themselves, but for others as well, the proper direction of life. They are much revered in Tagris society. Occasionally, there are individuals (usually those devoid of all true discernment) who convince themselves that they are Pathfinders, while lacking the ability. Inevitably, their blindness becomes obvious; but sometime not before they have done much damage to those who take their council. Such false Pathfinders are called Bewilderers, a term of deep scorn. Tagris are known for refer to many human leaders by this term, and regard most humans as lost souls.

True Pathfinders frequently have strong psi abilities, which aid them in their discernments. These abilities usually take the form of divinatory capabilities, enabling them to intuit the character of an individual and see the lines of fates that rule their life. Many humans have come to take council for Tagris Pathfinders, and their wisdom is highly regarded in many human circles (though scorned in others).

Religious Tagris will typically take time each day to meditate and consider the path their lives are taking. They are usually unconcerned with “success”, but instead with following their own destiny. A character who is a religious Tagris will be little swayed by opportunities simply because they would seem to lead to fame, fortune, or romance.

VANTOR

The Vantor are an aquatic people, and until their contact with humans, they had no written language. So their religion was an oral tradition, strongly tied to family and clan. Their oral religion is completely intermeshed with their oral history and full of tales that are partly historical and partly religious, fully mythologized and worn smooth by many generation of retelling. (Earthly analogs would be the Trojan war chronicles and the Jewish Exodus story.)

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The moral teachings of the Vantor are not in the form of rules or laws, but are moral fables and parables. (Their laws are, in fact, of a similar form. Rewards and punishments from legend are used as precedents.) There is no formal priesthood. Religious leaders are those with the most dramatic telling of the old legends and who can pick out the tale which has the most bearing on the events at hand.

The Vantor have no concept of an afterlife, as such, seeing themselves as living on through their relatives and descendants. One ancestors are always remembered, and as long as you are remembered, you live on. The greatest triumph is to become part of one of the Great Tales, in which case your life continues throughout the life of the entire race.

Religious Vantor remain close to members of their family and clan. They regard being with them for births, funerals, and seasonal feasts as matters of great importance, worth great effort to attend. For example, if a religious Vantor character is told that a member of their family has died, they would be expected to immediately forgo all other obligations to attend the funeral. Religious Vantor also regard telling of the stories of their clan as a moral obligation and will do so to any who will deign to listen. Similarly, they regard listening to the stories of others as a moral obligation. A character who is a religious Vantor and will listen attentively to anyone telling a story, regardless of how boring or repetitive it may be.

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RELIGION	NATURE OF THE DIVINE	SACRAMENTS	MARRIAGE FORM
Grand Catholicism	Monotheism	Baptism, Eucharist, Marriage, Unction Child Blessing, (divorce allowed)	Monogamy
Ahl al-Fiqh	Monotheism	Declaration of faith, Almsgiving, Formal prayer, Fasting	Contract marriage
Taiping Mormonism	Hierarchical henotheism (Adam-God)	Baptism, Child Blessing, Marriage, Martyrdom	Polygyny (no divorce)
Transhuman Theonarcissism	Future Self	Rejuvenation	Partnership at will
Amida Christianity	Monotheism	Baptism, Marriage, Funeral	Monogamy (divorce allowed)
Metadox Judaism	Monotheism	Numerous	Varied forms
Polytheocrassic Monism	Polytheistic Monism	Name-giving, Marriage, Funeral	Varied forms
Old Order Atheism	Nonexistant	Denial of faith	Contract marriage
Neo-Adamite Christianity	Monotheism	None	Informal
The Penitents	Monotheism	Baptism, Eucharist, Marriage, Unction Martyrdom	Line Marriages (To keep the families alive)
Mystical Union	Pantheism	Meditation	Personal commitment
Ecumenic Fundamentalism	Monotheism	Sacred Ablutions, Feast of God Prayer, Affirmation of Faith	Polygamy
Providencialism	Trancendent	None	Contract marriage
The Clear Way	Non-Specific Theism	Name-giving, Sacrifice, Ritual Prayer, Marriage, Funeral	Monogamy
The Zany Way	Non-Specific Theism	Meditation, Joy, Silliness	Temporary Liaison
The Way of Beauty	Non-Specific Theism	Meditation, Crafting	Personal Commitment
The Path	Monotheism	Personal Pathfinding	Polyandry
The Great Tale	Pantheism	None	Varied Forms