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## Are Dwarves Protestant? American Religion and *Dungeons & Dragons*

**Abstract:** I analyze the ideology of representation of religion in the tabletop role-playing game (TRPG) *Dungeons & Dragons*. I approach TRPGs as a type of protostory, an interactive set of stories governed by rules which provides affordances to create different stories. Whether a specific story is relatively hard or easy to instantiate from the protostory indicates if this particular instantiation serves as a preferred, negotiated, or oppositional reading of the TRPG rules. Based on an analysis of the dimensions of religion proposed by Ninian Smart, contrasted with Harold Bloom's idea of American religion, as well as the concept of intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientation, I discuss the similarity between the way *Dungeons & Dragons* simulates religion, and the traditional understanding of religion in American culture.

**Keywords:** Ninian Smart, religious studies, *Dungeons & Dragons*, game studies, tabletop RPG

### 1. Simulating religion

My article considers the ideology behind the approach of the tabletop role-playing game (TRPG) *Dungeons & Dragons* (*D&D*) to simulation of religion. For the purpose of this article I define religion as a way to mediate the transcendental, spiritual, or supernatural and make these accessible for believers (Meyer and Moors 6). While this definition is not without its flaws, it appears fitting for *D&D*, considering the importance of gods, encoded as clearly real but, at the same time, separated from the material world.

Games, whether analogue or digital, have an ability to represent and make statements about different phenomena through rules, creating what Ian Bogost called *procedural statements* (28). Another pioneer of game studies, Gonzalo Frasca, wrote about simulation: “to simulate is to model a (source) system through

a different system which maintains to somebody some of the behaviors of the original system” (224).

Both Bogost and Frasca contrasted simulation with more traditional “representation”—the depiction of real-world phenomena through textual or audiovisual signs. However, both representation and simulation depend on what Tom Apperley called *resonance* (21), a feeling that a game or some of its elements remind a player of something outside of the game, for example, a religious institution.

Resonance could be caused by textual, visual, or behavioural familiarity. However, as Sebastian Möring (210) pointed out, the feeling of recognition may be caused by the similarity between a game and traditional cultural conventions dictating how a simulated system should behave, not a system itself.

Thus, I approach relationships between games and systems they simulate as a three-part scheme. First, a society produces an understanding of a particular phenomenon, influenced by dominant ideology, historical circumstances, and other sociocultural conditions. Second, this understanding spreads, creating what Roland Barthes called *myths* (109). Finally, myths influence games, both at the level of game design and reception of the game by the audience, both intended by game designers and not.

Since resonance relies so much upon cultural conventions, an understanding of “how religion works in *D&D*” tells us nothing about how religion actually works. It does, however, elucidate how players perceive its workings, making research into this topic a promising way to understand the image of religion in modern society, that is, the *myth of religion*.

To complicate matters further, *D&D* does not simply “mirror” our culture—it has an agency of its own. For example, one of the game creators, Gary Gygax, a practising Christian and a Middle Ages aficionado who was willing to make a medieval-themed wargame during a time when this historical period was not popular among hobbyists, obviously shaped the game according to his personal views and aesthetic preferences (Peterson 54–80, 177).

In fact the surprising attention that *D&D* paid to religion in general, with Cleric being one of the only three initially conceived character classes, might have stemmed from Gygax’s interests. However, the immense influence of *D&D* on later popular culture means that it does not simply copy existing myths, but forms new ones.

Take the class of Cleric as an example. As Jon Peterson showed, it did not have the same clear-cut prototype in the fantastic milieu of its time as so-called Fighting-Men and Magic-Users. Instead, the Cleric class combined different popular tropes, from cross-wielding priests fighting vampires to medieval chivalry orders (Peterson 260–70). But nowadays Cleric itself has become a staple of popular culture, surpassing even *D&D* in the level of recognition after its inclusion in multi-player online role-playing games, such as *World of Warcraft*.

This makes an analysis of *D&D* extremely relevant for understanding the place of religion in the modern world. And the specific research question of this article is

“How, according to the *Dungeons & Dragons* role-playing game, does the system of religion function, and what myths of religion does that game encode?”

## 2. Tabletop role-playing games as a protostory

I approach TRPGs as a type of *protostory*: a hypothetical set of all possible stories that could be created, with specific stories emerging from it through a process called *instantiation* (Koenitz 2).

Instantiation consists of two interrelated processes. First, a player uses objective game rules to create specific in-game situations. If, according to *D&D* rules, an attack lowers the number of opponents’ hit points to sixteen, participants, being a part of the game’s *magic circle* (Huizinga 10), have to acknowledge that.

Second, a player, with the help of signs encoded in the game by its creators and cues provided by other participants of the game, interprets a situation turning it into a part of a coherent narrative. A decrease of the amount of hit points can be interpreted as a wound, fatigue, or as an abstraction with no concrete narrative meaning. Players constantly produce their individual interpretations, which are harmonized with the Dungeon Master acting as a mediator, a judge, and a facilitator, producing so-called *shared imaginary space* (Hammer et al. 293).

Objective actions and subjective interpretations of the game strongly influence one another. Actions and rules limit and shape the flow of the game, while interpretations set the particular logic and goals. And both rely upon the *affordances* provided by the game (Linderoth 4). Jonas Linderoth writes about affordances in the context of video games: “Game-play is to perceive, act on, and transform the affordances that are related to a game system or to other players in a game” (8). A game, therefore, is a constant string of perceiving and realizing particular affordances.

In principle, lack of technical limitations and reliance on social conventions between participants means that any TRPG provides affordances for any conceivable action. Still, by analyzing rules and narrative signs presented by the game, it is possible to organize sets of affordances for the instantiation of specific stories in accordance with the hierarchy of *readings* presented by Stuart Hall, marking some of them as *preferred*, *oppositional*, or *negotiated* (102). The main question would be how hard is it to instantiate a particular story, both in terms of finding necessary rules and interpreting in-game situations created by them.

In the case of *D&D*, stories about heroes fighting an army of monsters would be one of the game’s preferred readings. A story about intrigues at the royal court, with minimum battles, but echoing traditions of the fantasy genre—a negotiated reading. A story of social workers rehabilitating monsters whose parents died at the hands of adventurers—an oppositional reading.

I will focus on the preferred decoding of *D&D* rules regarding religion. In that sense, my research focuses on what Lars de Wildt (35) described as representation

of religion in games, consciously excluding consideration of the way games are produced and understood by actual players.

This approach runs the risk of trapping research in the echo chamber of their own, inevitably subjective, theories, for example, confusing ubiquitous religious imagery in games with interest in religion as a real-world institution (de Wildt 21). To avoid this, I emphasize the need to approach TRPGs as protostories. My research does not claim to objectively describe how any portrayal of religion in *D&D* games would go—only what narratives on the topic are easier to instantiate. I hope that in the future the research presented in this article may serve as a theoretical framework for a player-oriented work, contrasting affordances provided by the game with the actual experience of players from different cultural and religious backgrounds.

### 3. *Dungeons & Dragons* and religion

Throughout its fifty-year history, *D&D* has created a wealth of content resonating with the idea of religion. Cults, gods, character options, etc., are scattered across dozens of supplements: descriptions of settings, races, fantastic cultures and suggestions for Dungeon Masters. Still, there are three groups of books that may serve as a basis for this analysis.

The first group of sources is, of course, information on religion contained in the main rulebooks: *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual*. Most, though not all, of *D&D* editions revolve around this “big three”, a set that should be sufficient for any game.

The second group of sources are books dealing specifically with the topic of religion. The first supplement of this type, *Supplement IV: Gods, Demi-Gods & Heroes*, came out in 1976, merely two years after the release of the original *D&D*. Later, *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons (AD&D)* was complemented with *Deities & Demigods*, and *AD&D* 2nd edition—with *Legends & Lore*. Particularly important is the second book titled *Deities & Demigods*, a supplement for *D&D* 3rd edition, written by James Wyatt, a game designer graduating from Union Theological Seminary in 1993, who even worked as a minister for two years. It was during this time that Wyatt started writing for Tactical Studies Rules, the publisher of *D&D* (Ryan 2). Later editions cannot boast similar religion-themed source books, but provide more information about religion in the core set itself.

Finally, the third group of sources are books on the Planescape settings, especially *On Hallowed Ground*. This setting paid remarkable attention to gods, religion, and the afterlife. Specifically, Planescape enshrined the idea that punishment or reward awaits every mortal after death in the realm of a god they worshipped in life, despite the fact that some older books mentioned the idea of reincarnation for some races. While Planescape was discontinued by the end of the 1990s, its influ-

ence on the interpretation of gods and religion in *D&D* far surpasses other sources outside of “core” books and dedicated supplements.

These three groups of books somewhat correspond with the three main venues of interaction between the participants of the game and religion: the afterlife, character options (classes in particular), and gods.

Religious classes appeared in *D&D* very early: *AD&D* already featured Cleric (a priest), as well as subclasses of Paladin (a divine-powered Fighter), Druid (a more nature-oriented Cleric), and Monk (a martial artist inspired by *wuxia* films). The latter three became independent classes in subsequent editions, and all four of them remain the core options for those willing to play as a religious hero. Although additional supplements often expanded this list with options like Divine Chosen or Spirit Shaman, they remain outside the scope of this paper.

In the current, 5th edition of *D&D* it has become easier to play a character of any class as being religious. This is achieved by the inclusion of separate religious archetypes for some “secular” classes, like Zealot and Totem Warrior for a barbarian, and through the addition of the Backgrounds system. It allows players to determine a hero’s occupation before adventuring, and includes the obviously religious Acolyte, as well as an affordance for a religious interpretation of a Hermit.

Ironically, gods entered the *D&D* milieu a bit later than the concept of Cleric, but only barely. By the time *Supplement IV: Gods, Demi-Gods & Heroes* was published, the concept of deities as important elements of the campaign world had already gained traction, although the focus was on providing gods with combat statistics and a short description of them as characters.

The original *Deities & Demigods* as well as *Legends & Lore* did not include new deities made specifically for *D&D*—instead, they adopted a list of gods from historical myths and popular fiction of the era. The gods created specifically for *D&D* were excluded from the core set of books until the 3rd edition. Also, starting with the supplements for that edition, the logic of describing gods somewhat shifted from combat-oriented statistics and abilities towards their teachings and roles in fictional worlds.

#### 4. Dimensions of religion

While particular settings of *D&D* may boast an impressive array of pantheons and religious institutions, for the purpose of this article I analyze “*D&D* religion” as a single, unified imagined tradition, based on its unified approach to contacting the transcendental, exemplified by the universality of “religious” classes and spells.

This singular tradition can be analyzed through the concept of *dimensions of religion*, introduced by Ninian Smart (*Mao, Dimensions of the Sacred*). A staunch anti-essentialist, Smart thought that religious studies should be preoccupied not

with the search for a singular nature of religion, but with ways to organize and systemize our knowledge of the field. For this purpose, he created the concept of seven religious dimensions—different types of mechanisms for preserving religious experience. Supposedly, all dimensions are present in any religion, though their relative importance varies greatly.

The *doctrinal dimension* is an intellectually coherent expression of the main ideas of a religion, especially concerning ontology and metaphysics. The duality of body and soul, or the natural world and eternal God, are important elements of Christian doctrine.

The *mythological and narrative dimension* consists of all narratives that possess religious meaning in the eyes of believers. The story of Jesus is an obvious example of this dimension in Christianity.

The *ethical and legal dimension* consists of prescribed norms of behaviour, including a stance on what actions are considered good or bad in terms of morality, as well as specific religious laws and restrictions. The Ten Commandments and numerous commentaries on them are a good example.

The *ritual or practical dimension* includes actions and behaviours prescribed to or avoided by believers. Daily prayers, fasts, and masses form this dimension in Christianity.

The *experiential or emotional dimension* includes psychological states that possess a special meaning for the believers, or emotions saturated with religious meaning, with meditations and religious ecstasy serving as examples.

The *social dimension* of a religion encompasses the inter-religious social relations, as well as contact between a religion and the outside world, including other institutions, like the organization and politics of churches and congregations.

The *material dimension* encompasses artefacts, both man-made and found in nature, that the spiritual tradition endows with a special meaning. Church buildings, crosses, ceremonial clothing, and other objects constitute this dimension for Christianity.

Specific practices, objects, and ideas may belong to more than one dimension. For example, Christian mass in its entirety combines practically all of them. It is used as a way of remembering the life of Jesus (mythological), while being strongly based upon Christian ontology (doctrinal). It includes preaching of specific values (ethical), and the denial of communion can be used for policing a congregation (social). It is supposed to create an elevated state of psyche in participants (emotional). Finally, the ceremony often involves elaborate trappings (material).

Using Smart's methodology it is possible to untangle this web of relationships by, for example, pointing out which dimensions are more important than others based on historical and modern practices. The same operation can be performed with the fictional religious teachings constructed in *D&D*.

## 5. Dimensions of religion in *Dungeons & Dragons*

In order to compare the depiction of religion in rulebooks with the scheme described by Smart, I address the following question: which dimensions of religion are easier to include than ignore while instantiating a preferred type of story concerning religion? This implies analyses of both game mechanics providing affordances to include actions resonating with different dimensions of religion, and imagery and narrative signs providing affordances to interpret situations as something resonating with religion. Such an operation will allow for the dimensions of religion of *D&D* to be organized in a hierarchy according to the relative ease of including them in a game.

The emotional dimension is at the bottom of this hierarchy. While some spells and abilities, such as a monk's need for meditation or a religious barbarian's rage, might resonate with religiously themed altered states of consciousness, and descriptions of individual deities associate them with specific emotions, *D&D* contains few affordances for the systematic elevation of some feelings and emotional states in general, and religion is not an exception.

The ritual dimension is in a similar position. While *D&D* is full of rituals, up to the appearance of the word "ritual" as a term in the latest edition, it lacks affordances for portraying rituals as a religious duty. They are encoded as a means to an end, helping heroes solve practical problems, or, in the case of rituals available for Acolyte in the 5th edition—fixating changes in social status. The performance of rituals itself is not encoded as important, with few affordances to differentiate between rituals performed by members of different religions, or even by a Cleric and a Wizard.

The same can be said about the material dimension. There is a significant number of material objects in *D&D* associated with religion: holy symbols, holy water, material components for religious spells, and magical items connected with gods. However, the extremely pragmatic approach to magic and universalization of its rules make it difficult to instantiate stories where the material side of religion occupies an important place.

At first glance, there are many more affordances for instantiating stories that highlight the mythological dimension of religion. The very idea of mythology as a collection of narratives about deities and heroes resonates with the way *D&D* depicts religion, with its focus on personalities, names, aesthetics, and deeds of gods and pantheons. *Deities & Demigods* (3rd edition) practically identifies the creation of a religion with the creation of a pantheon.

However, from Smart's point of view, mythology is not just information describing the world and its most powerful inhabitants. It is a set of stories with a special meaning for the members of a particular religion. And the objective reality of

gods in *D&D* makes stories about them, despite their stylistic similarity to mythology, an objective history.

In a way, *D&D* follows the Enlightenment's understanding of myths as a sort of pseudo- or alternative science, a primitive way to describe the world, which, in the case of *D&D*, happens to be the right one. But acts of telling and veneration of said stories are practically absent in *D&D*: there are neither game mechanics, nor narrative incentive for a religious character to retell key myths of their religion, or for their player to come up with them at all.

The social dimension is in a similarly contradictory position. On the one hand, starting with early editions, *D&D* highlighted the existence of a social sphere of religion, with names of individual levels of Cleric often corresponding with ranks in Christian churches in the original *D&D*.

On the other hand, almost as early the social dimension of religion became evident in the case of antagonists: in *Temple of the Frog* (1975) adventure players fought a religious organization—a sinister cult. Over the years, “cultists” have become one of the typical *D&D* adversary groups, while evil gods became the single reason for the unethical behaviour of races such as orcs and the drow.

But the game provides few affordances for the further interaction with the social dimension. Adventurers belonging to “religious” classes do not have any game-mechanical obligations binding them to a particular organization, or even narrative restrictions imposed on them. Dungeon Masters can effortlessly ignore the social side of religion, while still staying completely within the preferred reading of the rules.

Moreover, the secular approach to religion as individualized practice is encoded as morally preferable over its more institutionalized forms. A players' party often includes followers of different religions, who, by definition, have to work together by overcoming or ignoring their differences, while their enemies often belong to cults of evil gods. This provides a lot of affordances to instantiate a story about a multi-religious party, united thanks to their “don't ask, don't tell” attitude towards religion, fighting against a faith-driven, homogeneous, and intolerant group.

The doctrinal dimension can be classified as one of the two most significant dimensions of religion in *D&D*. This was most noticeable during the existence of the Planescape setting and the cosmology associated with it, when a certain worldview acted as a universal basis for all *D&D* religions. The discontinuation of Planescape in 1998 (Appelcline 96) reduced the importance of religious ontology in *D&D*, but its metaphysics continues to influence the representation of religion and, in particular, the image of the afterlife to this day. Even gods and their deeds belong more firmly in the doctrinal, not mythological, dimension, for the reasons stated above.

Finally, the most important dimension, almost impossible to disregard during the instantiation of a story including religion, is ethical. *D&D* gods throughout history have been characterized by their place on the alignment chart, a simple mechanic simulating the moral and ethical perspective with the help of two axes: Good



versus Evil, and Law versus Chaos. The recommendations for religious classes position them as guardians and teachers of certain ways of life. For example, the description of Cleric in the 5th edition states that two most important questions for players are what god they serve and which principles they want to embody.

An interesting consequence of this attention to the ethical dimension is the need for evil deities to have equally coherent, if unattractive, ethical teachings, presented, for example, in the 3rd edition of *Deities & Demigods*.

This book describes deities in the logic of their dogma, directly using terms such as “teaching” and “philosophy” to explain what attracts people to worship a god. And the 1st edition of *Deities & Demigods* stated:

Deities of all types, from the highest to the lowest, expect a great deal of work from their clerics in return for the power to perform miracles. Clerics are expected to behave in a manner exemplary of the teachings of their faith. Even common everyday concerns must be viewed in the light of their beliefs. Clerics must stand out from the common fold as role models of correct behavior, exhibiting greater wisdom and thoughtfulness, and living out the precepts of their religions and alignments. (*Deities & Demigods* [AD&D 1e] 9)

This principle of “exchanging” the adherence to certain ethics for divine assistance lies at the centre of *D&D*’s preferred decoding of religion, with other dimensions revolving around it. The doctrinal dimension acts as reasoning and additional motivation for ethical behaviour; the social dimension provides an environment where ethics of various religious teachings clash in humorous or violent ways; the mythological dimension consists of examples and justifications for specific ethics, etc.

This “architecture” of religious dimensions bears little resemblance to polytheistic religions supposedly resonating with *D&D* on an aesthetic level, but strongly corresponds to what Harold Bloom called an *American religion*, as well as the opposition between intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientations introduced by Gordon Allport and J. Michael Ross.

## 6. American religion

In *American Religion*, Bloom describes the religious outlook of the Americans as a form of gnosticism. He identifies the following elements as present in the teachings and practices of a wide array of American religious movements: individualism and scepticism towards society, a pragmatic attitude towards action, the idea of man’s fundamentally divine nature, and an emphasis on information given by God to his followers.

He writes:

James’s italics center the Emersonianism of his vision, and bring us closer to crucial elements that mark the American difference: **solitude, individuality and the pragmatism of feelings, acts, and experiences rather than thoughts, desires, and memories.** The “personal”

modifies “experiences” and prepares for the American Christ of the twentieth century, who has become a personal experience for the American Christian. (Bloom 8, emphasis added)

According to Bloom (16), the Jesus of American Christians is not the Jesus who died or the Jesus who ascended into heaven, but resurrected Jesus, remaining in eternal and direct contact with each individual believer in the endless period between Easter and Pentecost. Importantly, this contact with the divine is described as something natural and constant, even routine, thanks to, as Bloom claims, the American understanding of the divine presence in man. He also describes religious fundamentalism as a constant threat lurking in the American religion, with individualism serving as a defence against it, allowing Americans to refrain from changing the society in accordance with their religious views by focusing on personal practice as the core of religion.

It is important to mention that Bloom’s ideas can be considered problematic, and for the purpose of this article they should not be taken as an accurate description of sociological situations in the United States. Instead, his work serves as a way to present an American myth of American religion, an intellectually coherent statement about what religion *might* be, supported by a number of previous thinkers and preachers, instead of what it *is* in reality.

And this myth strongly corresponds with the way religion functions in *D&D*. Religious characters remain in constant contact with their gods, at the same time remaining goal-oriented and pragmatic. The divinity of believers is encoded through the mechanics that allow Cleric to serve some abstract principle instead of deity, sometimes even openly stating that divine powers come from believers, not from gods. *D&D* strongly favours objective information about gods and intellectually coherent philosophies, a *gnosis* of different gods, over conflicting mythologies of their deeds.

But even more importantly, the American religion of Bloom and religion in *D&D* share a similar structure of religious dimensions, with ethical and doctrinal dimensions at the centre, and material, ritual, mythological, and, to a lesser extent, emotional—at the periphery.

They also share an anxiety about religious social institutions, showing them as ubiquitous, but somewhat redundant, thanks to the supposedly personal character of belief, and potentially dangerous because of the constant threat of religious fundamentalism, which could be countered by the individualized orientation of religious practice, encoded as “good”. *D&D* provides many affordances to instantiate a story of a conflict between individuals who practice their religion in private, and a fundamentalist group trying to impose their will upon a community, or even the whole world, with a clear ethical preference for the former. This resonates with both Bloom’s ideas and the scientific concept of intrinsic–extrinsic religious orientation, important for understanding religion in the United States.

## 7. Intrinsic–extrinsic religious orientation in *Dungeons & Dragons*

The concept of different *forms of religiosity* among believers has been researched by a number of scholars (e.g., Clayton and Gladden; Fichter). In this article I adopt the approach of Allport, later developed in collaboration with Ross. He identified three broad categories of so-called *orientations* among believers—approaches to the question of what it means to follow a religion: *intrinsic* (religion has its own independent value); *extrinsic* (religion acts as means of obtaining certain goals, such as social status, comfort, peace of mind); and *indiscriminately proreligious* (positive relation to religion in general, without seeking anything in particular in it).

Among different traits of orientations, Allport highlighted their relationship to prejudice. His research showed that intrinsic believers are the least inclined to prejudice, while indiscriminately proreligious are the most prejudiced. Allport wrote:

the intrinsic religious orientation is not an instrumental device. It is not a mere mode of conformity, nor a crutch, nor a tranquilizer, nor a bid for status. All needs are subordinated to an overarching religious commitment. In internalizing the total creed of his religion, the individual necessarily internalizes its values of humility, compassion, and love of neighbor. In such a life (where religion is an intrinsic and dominant value) there is no place for rejection, contempt, or condescension towards one's fellow man. (Allport and Ross 441)

It is worth mentioning that neither content nor context of specific religious ethics were considered by Allport, who automatically assumed that religions, first of all, teach some values at all, and, second, that those values are connected with humility and compassion. This makes his research problematic and colonial as a universal approach, but it does reflect the specific situation in American Christianity, strongly influenced by the American Protestant tradition of contrasting an internal faith with an outward appearance.

Such contrast sheds further light upon the architecture of religious dimensions of *D&D*, by elucidating the reasons for their organization described above—a necessity to provide affordances for playing a religious but tolerant character. In *D&D*, tolerance serves as a way to encode some characters as “good”, and, more importantly, as a gameplay necessity to provide the opportunity of creating a multi-religious party.

However, as exemplified by both Bloom and Allport, American religious culture connects tolerance with personal adherence to religious ethics, implicitly contrasting it with the more outward dimensions of religion, especially with the social one. *D&D* simply reiterates this approach, encoding good Clerics as exemplar intrinsic believers, and juxtaposing them with cultists and evil races resonating with the image of extrinsic believers, more bigoted and less sincere at the same time.

The surprisingly thorough appropriation of Allport's scheme by *D&D* may indicate the deep connection between American culture and the specific understanding of religiosity present in both of those texts.

## 8. Conclusion

If we approach games as *simulations*, we should be able to distinguish which parts of a simulated system are necessary in order for players to recognize said system and which parts can be sacrificed without losing the resonance. In the case of *D&D*, the simulation of religion revolves around the image of divine beings who judge their followers on the basis of their abilities to follow the specific ethical systems provided by them.

This fixation on ethics as core of religion means that the dualism of extrinsic and intrinsic orientation is presented as universal, with no affordances, for example, to role-play a believer with, for example, orientation of *religion as quest* (Batson and Schoenrade), accepting its mystery and limitation of their own knowledge. Only "evil" religions do not provide affordances for imagining intrinsic believers, instead often focusing on the social dimension.

This makes all of the religions in *D&D* just different forms of American Christianity, with players choosing only what kind of Jesus (elven Jesus, dwarven Jesus, female Jesus of Magic) their religious characters should follow, and often fighting a good fight of individualized religious practice against religious fundamentalism, resonating with Bloom's ideas.

At the same time, scholars such as Mark Chaves (2) have strongly criticized the assumption that to follow a religion means to adopt an internally coherent creed and to allow this creed to dictate your day-to-day behaviour. *D&D* does not simply portray this form of religiosity as preferable, but also transplants this specifically American approach to a completely different aesthetic resonating with medieval imagery and non-Western cultures. Considering the extensive influence of *D&D*, this process may be actively harmful in terms of distorting the understanding of both Western pre-modern period as well as quite modern practices and views of people from different cultures, whose religions and views do not adhere to myths of American religion.

This article does not address the historical and practical reasons for this approach to religion, which deserve an article of their own. For example, the pragmatic understanding of the ritual dimension came to the forefront because of the pragmatic nature of *D&D* games in general, especially in the beginning of its history, when it was more of a war game than an RPG in the modern sense. Similar reasons can be brought up in the case of other dimensions. The important thing here is that despite all of those game-imposed limitations, simulation of religion

in *D&D* still maintains the behaviour of the simulated system to millions of players, reiterating already existing cultural preconceptions, and spreading them further around the globe.

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