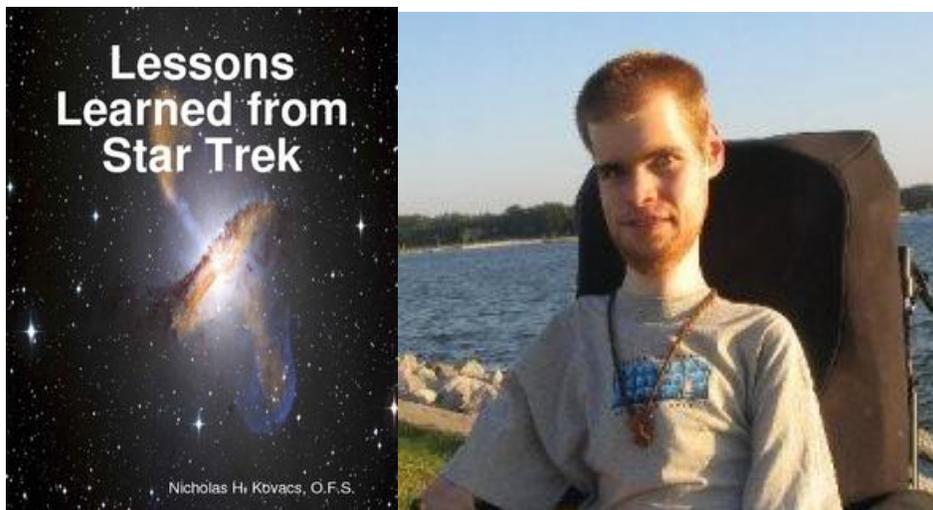


Lessons Learned from Star Trek by Nicholas Kovacs, ofs

Book review by Andrew Conradi, ofs of *Lessons Learned from Star Trek* by Nicholas Kovacs, ofs of Little Portion Fraternity, Victoria, BC, 2018,

A lulu Ebook, 169pp, US \$9.99 available through:

<http://www.lulu.com/shop/nicholas-h-kovacs-ofs/lessons-learned-from-star-trek/ebook/product-23648572.html>.



Nicholas, born a cradle Catholic in Canada in 1980, became a lukewarm Catholic in high school which he attributes to bad catechesis. In 1999, he moved with his family to Pensacola, FL and during the Great Jubilee 2000, Christ renewed Nick's faith. Although Nick is a dual citizen, and values his Canadian heritage, he considers himself to be more of an American than a Canadian. God willing, one day Nick hopes to return to the Gulf Coast of the USA permanently. In 2007 Nick became a professed OFS and was a member of the St. Thomas More Fraternity in Houston, TX, and the St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity in Pensacola, FL. Presently, he is an isolated member of Little Portion Fraternity, Victoria, BC because he lives in Powell River (approx 4 ½ hours away by ferry and car one way).

Nick has spent his entire life in a wheelchair with a neuromuscular disability which he now bravely sees as a gift from God. You may have heard of Nick because of his [Franciscan Family Chaplet](#), which prays for an increase in vocations and a growth in holiness of the whole Family.

Nick has been a *Star Trek* fan since Grade 2. He tells us it became "one of my great passions in life" and: "My *ready room* (den) is decorated with many Star Trek collectibles, which I enjoy looking at, when I am working on my writing projects."

I used to be a book reviewer for the BC School Librarians Association and although I cannot say I am a Trekie fan myself, I did find the book very interesting. Popular culture plays a role in forming values and the values *Star Trek* espouses are certainly ones we Franciscans can support. *Star Trek* has an iconic presence in popular culture, especially but not only, North American, through TV, films, toys, comic books, reference books, novels, & parodies etc.,

Nick covers the evolution of *Star Trek* in detail. It was written by Gene Rodenberry, a former World War II US Army Air Corps pilot who saw action in the Pacific. He later flew for Pan American Airways and then became a police speech writer before turning full time to writing for films & TV in 1956. Nick outlines the history of *Star Trek*; the first episodes were written in 1964 with a Horatio Hornblower character and a multi-racial crew and set as science fiction. Input was sought from Isaac Asimov. It had a rocky start but was revived and its subsequent success is history.

Rodenberry was raised a Southern Baptist and at one time was interested in the application of Christianity in a TV series. Later on he said: "I reject religion. I accept the notion of God."

Nick tells us: "The purpose of this book is to not only talk about my love of Star Trek, but to also show the important moral lessons which can be found in watching the television series' and movies." & "This book is divided into four categories: *Ethical and Human Dignity Lessons, Intelligent Design Lessons, Government, Economics, Liberty, and Justice Lessons, and Lessons from the Logical and Illogical.*"

Some examples of Ethical and Human Dignity Lessons are:

"He is different, yes. But that does not make him expendable, or any less significant. No being is so important that he can usurp the rights of another." ("Star Trek: The Next Generation" Episode: "The Schizoid Man" - Captain Jean-Luc Picard)

"We do believe all planets have a sovereign claim to inalienable human rights." ("Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country" – Chekov)

"One species is significant. A single life is significant." ("Star Trek: Voyager" Episode: "Year of Hell - Part II" -Commander Chakotay)

I have to take exception to something he writes: "Although the War Against Terrorism officially started in 2001, the first official radical Islamic terrorist attack happened in the '90s at the World Trade Center." Here Nick shows an American-centrist historical bias that those of us who are not American might not accept.

In 1948, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood (founded in 1928) assassinated Egypt's Prime Minister, Mahmoud an-Nukrashi Pasha. In the late 1960s, Palestinian secular

movements such as Al Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) began to target civilians outside areas of conflict. We must not forget the 11 Israeli athletes massacred at the 1972 Munich Olympics. The year 1979, in which the western supported Shah of Iran was overthrown, was a turning point in international terrorism. Despite Islamic teachings against suicide and killing innocent people in battle, terrorist groups like Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, (or "ISIS" or "Daesh" as Assyrian Christians call it) have used a political form of Islam known as "Islamism" to justify a holy war of terrorism. In 1988, Osama bin Laden founded Al Qaeda; on 7 August 1998, Al Qaeda terrorists set off bombs in Kenya and Tanzania. The blasts killed about 250 Africans and 12 Americans. But please forgive me if I cavil.

The key element on which all Catholic Social Doctrine is based is that of human dignity. Nick tells us Rodenberry's basic philosophical theme in *Star Trek* is *what it means to be human*. Good intentions alone are meaningless if evil means are adopted but the characters representing the good and bad in human nature can learn from their mistakes.

Here is how Nick believes this theme is handled: "Gene's vision of Star Trek is a great gift to our world, because it teaches simple philosophy in an entertaining and simple way. Sometimes philosophy can sound very complex and difficult to understand. Gene has the common man's approach, which can teach complicated philosophy in a user-friendly manner. Everybody knows and remembers Mr. Spock and Lieutenant Commander Data, and all of their funny ways of trying to understand humanity. The art of humor is a little teaching tool, to help us remember the important complex philosophical lessons of life." He goes on to quote Shakespeare: "What a piece of work is man!" and describes how Rodenberry treats the range and complexity of human relations and vocations including marriage and its unitive and procreative nature.

When Nick talks of "the common man's approach" I am reminded of St Francis of Assisi!

Thank you Nick for writing this book! I encourage *Star Trek* fan's and those interested in popular culture's influence to buy and read Nick's book and spread to word.

Peace & joy, Andrew, ofs