Luke, I Am Not Your Father

One of the greatest movie lines in history is in *Star Wars*, when the evil Darth Vader reveals the awful truth to our hero Luke Skywalker: "Luke, I am your father." (Actually, this is a misquote, but it's become part of our cultural lexicon anyway. Check out this YouTube video of a four-year-old's priceless reaction to seeing this scene in Star Wars for the first time.)



Luke is understandably traumatized by the revelation that the enemy is actually his daddy.

He's in good company. Millions—probably billions—of people in human history have sustained "father wounds" because their dads were punitive, abusive, evil, distant, judgmental, absent, unsafe, or just disengaged. We live in a fallen world where our relationships are broken, and where hurt people, hurt people. A father's role is incredibly powerful, both for good and for evil, and every father makes an indelible impression on his children whether he intends to or not.

Children grow up receiving many messages about what a father is like by watching their dads—and boy, do they watch their dads. The only way a boy can learn how to be a man is by watching and copying men, and a father is the closest man to a child. The way a girl learns the value of being female is by watching how her father treats her mother and herself. Children can grow up learning that a father is loving and kind, disciplining from a teaching heart that wants them to

grow up to be good adults, a man of integrity and honesty. Many of us were blessed to grow up with just such a dad, and with the "heart template" of a father like that, we can become a parent very much like our wonderful dads—and the generational blessings of a good example are handed down through the years.

But children can also grow up learning that a father is a mean bully whose anger is to be feared and avoided. They can learn that a father's temperament is volatile; they never know if he will embrace them warmly or freeze them out with contempt or indifference. They can learn that a father's word cannot be trusted, and that he presents himself with one face in the world and the church, but quite another at home. They can learn that a father is non-communicative and authoritarian, a deadly combination. Some children grow up learning that a father is nothing more than a sperm donor who is there to conceive them but disappears forever.

This is bad enough, but it gets worse.

God puts children in families where they learn about Him from the way their parents model parenthood. Our concept of "father" is whatever our own dads looked and acted like. Then, when we discover that God reveals Himself as Father in His Word, we paint the face of our heavenly Father with a brush dipped into the bucket of whatever our own fathers were like.

One of my friends shared with me several hurtful stories of the way her dad related to her in judgment throughout her entire life—including the breathtaking condemnation, "If you disappoint *me* this much, how much more must you disappoint God??" She really struggled with trusting Him. One day I told her, "Sweetie, you don't know God. He is not a heavenly version of your earthly father. He is who He is. Let's pray that you will see Him as He really is." Later, she told me that being told she didn't know God was the turning point in her relationship with Him, and she started reading the

scriptures with an eagerness to find out who He actually is. She started living out Romans 12:2–"be transformed by the renewing of your mind"–and gratefully allowed the Holy Spirit to change the earthly-father filter though which she understood God the Father to be.

One of the kindest things God can tell us is, "Child, I am not your earthly father. I am your heavenly Father. Let Me transform the way you see me through the power of My word." One of the best places to marinate and meditate is Luke 15. Jesus told all three stories in that chapter to reveal to us the heart of His Father. We are most familiar with the third story, the parable commonly called "The Prodigal Son." But it's really about the amazing, grace-filled Father. That story is the best and most accurate filter in the whole Bible for testing our conception of God.

If we see God as vindictive and full of wrath, anxious to blast us with His angry thunderbolts: how does the Father in Luke 15 compare? Where is the judgmental condemnation in that story? It's not there!

If we see God as distant, unapproachable and uncommunicative, what do we do with the picture of the Father out looking every day for His lost child to return, running to meet him when he finally does?

If we see God as stingy and mean-spirited about His wealth, how does Jesus' picture of the Father's generous heart correct our perception?

If Luke Skywalker were real and looking to the Lord, I think he might hear, "Luke, I am NOT your father. I am your Father. Come here and let Me enfold you in My good, loving and safe embrace."

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Prometheus, God and Film: 10 Science Fiction Movies with a Theological Theme

Dr. Terlizzese looks to see if we can find a Christian worldview perspective or, at least, questions which need theological answers in a number of popular science fiction movies. He finds some good themes and bad themes and offers advice on how to view movies of all types.

Sci-fi films have never been more popular than they are today. Witness this summer's offerings: *Prometheus* (see below), *Chronicle*, *The Hunger Games* even the comic book–inspired *Avengers* and the romantic comedy *Seeking a Friend for the End of the World* feature elements of science fiction. And like most arts and literature, they contain elements of theology. This genre borrows a basic aspect of the Christian worldview concerning the value and meaning of individuals in a world of technological conformity.

Sci-fi combines a somewhat biblical understanding of mankind with an almost religious belief in technological progress. This fuels the popular fear that technology will rob people of their souls or individuality. The modern technological worldview is rooted in *materialism*: it affirms that people are basically machines who can be objectified, categorized and manipulated as any other object in nature. One film scholar notes this connection:

> *Scientism opened the doors for a mechanical view of mankind.*

> *. . . We are no longer special, no longer sacred – neither the form (body) nor the mind. "Let us conclude boldly then that man is a machine, and that there is only one substance, differently modified, in the whole world. What will all the weak reeds of divinity, metaphysic, and nonsense of the schools avail against this firm and solid oak?"[Le Mettrie]. [Sci-fi] arises out of the tension between this kind of "rude" scientism and the Christian cosmology. Scientism "robs" humans of their very humanity and makes them out to be biological machines, much like the alien children in Village of the Damned. {1}*

Reaching a Popular Audience

The sci-fi genre asks, What is human nature?{2} In light of technological advance, how we define humanity becomes more crucial as technology changes not just the natural world, but humanity itself. It has become imperative not only for philosophers, but for everyone to ask, how is technological advance transforming human nature? The failure to perceive change caused by new technology creates a serious problem for an age so enormously influenced by it. Sci-fi movies serve as a philosophical treatise for average people who are not professionally trained, raising questions and issues that would otherwise be lost on the common person because of their intolerable abstraction.

The movies speak the common language of our times. When teachers want to make an idea concrete or illustrate a point, they grope for an example from a popular movie. Most people love movies and to be able to relate abstract concepts through such a relevant medium will certainly create a profound effect.

We normally think of sci-fi as promoting innovative technology that holds out optimistic promise for the future of mankind. This is generally true of print media produced by popular

writers like Jules Verne, H. G. Wells or Isaac Asimov. However sci-fi film has taken another tack by appealing to commonly held suspicions of technological progress. An optimistic view of progress views new technology as a liberating force destined to lift the burdens of work, cure disease, improve communication and free humanity from natural limits. A pessimistic view takes the opposite direction; instead of liberation it fears that new technology will create a new form of enslavement and dehumanization that will rob people of their individuality or their very souls.

Given the popularity of movies and the latent theological premise of many sci-fi films, the following list presents an incomplete, but important sample of theology in sci-fi movies. It is intended to help Christians read the movies from more than a literalist perspective by paying attention to the metaphors and symbols that constitute their meaning. These movies may contain objectionable material, but more importantly, resonate with redemptive themes worth analyzing.

Movies are cultural day dreams, serving as modern folklore and morality tales. They signify a shared message of hope or fear not always transparent without analysis. So let’s get started!

Prometheus, 2012

Humanoid aliens seed earth with their DNA that creates humanity. They leave clues behind on how to find them in a distant galaxy. When earthlings discover their origins they uncover a plan for human extinction, revealing that the gods are hostile towards their own children. The movie raises classic theological and philosophical questions such as, Where did we come from? Why are we here? And, where are we going? Though never distinguishing between wishful thinking or religious truth claims, it presents faith as a choice for meaning, even in the face of the most hostile conditions. The cross remains a prominent and enduring symbol of hope and human redemption. Humans are worth saving and are not genetic

mistakes that deserve extinction.

The Terminator, 1984

Robots represent both hope and fear of technological aspirations. They symbolize the incredible potential of technological capability and human replacement. Robots are mechanical people that embody the fears of extreme rationalization. Cartesian philosophy identified reason as the definition of human nature, which takes its final form in the computer. Robots are nothing more than embodied computers. Sometimes the movies picture them as our slaves and protectors. Robots enable people to live work–free lives as with Robby the Robot from *Forbidden Planet* (1956) who undoubtedly depicts the most iconic and loveable of all movie robots. However, most robots represent something evil and ominous as in *The Terminator.*

The premise states that computer intelligence Sky Net became self-aware and immediately perceived humanity as a threat and initiated a nuclear strike. Some people survived to fight back and achieved ultimate victory led by the messianic figure John Conner sent to rescue humanity from techno–enslavement and termination. Human victory over the machines necessitated that Sky Net send a robot agent back in time to eliminate the mother of the rebel leader. Commentators read the plot as loosely based on the story of the Birth of Christ. *The Terminator* encapsulates the abiding fear that mankind will one day destroy itself through the use of its own technology. That which was meant to enhance human life will one day annihilate it. The need for salvation remains paramount as the last installment *Terminator Salvation* (2009) indicates.

The Matrix, 1999

In the not too distant future Artificial Intelligence (AI) becomes self–aware and identifies humanity as a threat and initiates a war, a common theme in science fiction. Humanity burns the atmosphere to create perpetual darkness in order to

block the sun and deny the machines a power source. The machines respond by turning people into batteries and growing them in a huge incubator, kept alive in a vegetative state through feeding them the blood of the previous generation and by sending false impressions to the brain that simulate a normal existence. Billions of people are given fabricated lives in a huge computer–simulated world called the Matrix. Zion, the only surviving human city, awaits deep underground for their savior Neo, rescued from the Matrix and believed to possess the power to fight the machines within the Matrix and free mankind.

In addition to the obvious messianic overtones the series presents a complicated patchwork of different religious ideas from Christianity and Buddhism to Greek mythology as a counterpoint to the Cartesian philosophy that reason alone ultimately defines human nature. The computer best embodies the logical conclusion of rational thought and the loss of human freedom that results from the universal acceptance of rationalism. *The Matrix* demonstrates an acute historical irony in rejecting rationalism and looking to premodern religious ideas to define human nature and provide meaning to life, even though these ideas are considered anachronistic in a secular and technological age.

The Book of Eli, 2010

The Book of Eli presents an explicitly Christian message of obedience to the voice of God in describing the spiritual journey and act of faith by the blind nomad Eli. Set in a post–apocalyptic world of the near future, a drifter finds his purpose in life through committing to memory the *King James Bible*, then spending thirty years traveling across the wasteland to an unknown destination. Along the way Eli encounters a ruthless mayor seeking the power of the book for his own political ends. In addition to the spiritual journey the movie depicts the dark side of faith when used to control and manipulate others.

The Invasion, 2007

The Invasion is an excellent remake of the original science fiction masterpiece *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956, 1979) in which spores from outer space take over human bodies by emptying them of free will and any unique qualities as individuals, making everyone soulless and identical. The message is clear: that a world without free will may be more peaceful and happy, but would be horribly inhuman. What price are we willing to pay for peace, security and harmony? If these qualities are not derived from love then we do not have a world worth living in. In the absence of freedom, a nightmarish world of automatons pretending to be humans assumes control. They are bodies without souls. In the chilling words of the original movie, "Love, desire, ambition, faith—without them life's so simple."{3} This may be life in unison, but it is more like the life of a grove of trees all getting along rather nicely. This movie franchise argues for the idea that love and choice are essential aspects of our humanity without which life loses it purpose.

Planet of the Apes, 1968

This 1960's protest film decries the potential genocide of nuclear war. Astronauts find themselves stranded on a strange planet where apes rule humans. The movie has several themes including the debate between evolution and creation, science and religion, church and state relations as well as racism and offers an accurate commentary on humanity as a creature that wages war on all those around it including himself. It is rare to find any movie that weaves so many themes into its message, while not revealing its main point until its climactic surprise ending.

The Day the Earth Stood Still, 1951

We do not need to see films based on the Gospels in order to find Christ at the movies. The presence of a Christ–like figure is usually signified when a heroic character with

extraordinary powers dies and comes back to life, such as in the case of Klatuu, the representative of a galactic alliance who visits earth during the Cold War and warns that we must turn our efforts to peace or face annihilation because earth poses a threat to the rest of the galaxy. Humanity's technical abilities now exceed its self–control, which will end in disaster if it does not turn to peaceful ends.

Star Wars, 1977

Science fiction generally focuses on the power of reason and technology. *Star Wars* follows a different tack, making faith and religion central. The movie sets the action in the familiar device of good vs. evil, but adds the dimension of faith being more powerful than technical ability in the promotion of both good and evil. The *Star Wars* franchise contrasts with that other perennially popular space melodrama *Star Trek,* which often belittles notions of God, faith and religion. Based on the secular humanism of its creator Gene Roddenberry, technology or human potential trumps faith and religion. In contrast, *Star Wars* derives from the ecumenical ideas of George Lucas, where faith represented by "the force"–for better or worse–is more powerful than raw technological ability.

Close Encounters of the Third Kind, 1977

Everyman Roy Neary experiences a close encounter with a UFO that sends him on a journey to discover its meaning. In the process he acts erratically, causing his wife Ronnie to leave him with their three children. The further he delves into the mystery, the more he discovers the truth behind his encounter: that extraterrestrials have visited earth and are seeking him out along with a select group of others. The movie vaguely resembles John Bunyan's famous allegory of the Christian life, *Pilgrim's Progress*. Aliens often represent transcendence in the movies, either as angelic messengers or demonic powers. *Close Encounters* may be interpreted as a spiritual journey

that seeks out a higher purpose in life beyond mundane existence.

2001: A Space Odyssey, 1968

2001 lives up to its reputation as the greatest science fiction movie ever made. The movie begins with a tribe of hominids on the brink of starvation. An extraterrestrial force endows them with the gift of technology in the form of animal bones used to hunt for food and murder their opponents. The action then moves to outer space when the murder weapon is flung into the air and transforms into a space ship, suggesting continuity between the earliest technology and the most advanced.

Mankind finds itself on the brink of encountering extraterrestrial (ET) life near Jupiter. A small crew travels to the location of a beacon with the assistance of an onboard supercomputer, the HAL 9000, who (he is strangely human) becomes threatened by the crew who want to turn off his higher cognitive ability. HAL murders the crew except for one member who escapes and finishes the mission. After his encounter with the ET, Commander Bowman converts into an angelic figure, or star child who returns to earth. Director Stanley Kubrick comments on the meaning of this scene when he says of Bowman, "He is reborn, an enhanced being, a star child, an angel, a superman, if you like, and returns to earth prepared for the next leap forward in man's evolutionary destiny."{4}

The star child is the first of a new race representing a spiritual rather than technological change. "Kubrick's vision reveals technology as a competitive force that must be defeated in order for humans to evolve."{5} The message of *2001* is that, though technology assists humanity in survival, it also threatens human existence.

A Final Word

Humanity now needs a spiritual transformation, not more

technology, in order to survive. Although we find this theological message in an unusual source, it still represents an important warning we have yet to heed.

Notes

1. Per Schelde, *Androids, Humanoids and Other Science Fiction Monsters* (New York: New York University Press, 1993),125.

2. Deborah Knight and George McKnight, "What is it to be human? *Blade Runner* and *Dark City*" in *The Philosophy of Science Fiction Film*, ed., Steven M. Sanders (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 26.

3. M. Keith Booker, *Alternative Americas: Science Fiction Film and American Culture* (Westport CT: Praeger, 2006), 63.

4. Stanley Kubrick quoted in Thomas A. Nelson, *Kubrick: Inside a Film Artist's Maze* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 133.

5. Daniel Dinello, *Technophobia! Science Fiction Visions of Posthuman Technology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 99.

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The Worldview of Star Wars – A Christian Evaluation

Dr. Zukeran takes a critical, balanced view of this popular movie series to help us understand the worldview it presents in light of a biblical worldview. From a Christian perspective, he points out the positive themes of the movies

presented from a pantheistic worldview. We can use these movies to generate conversations about the differences between the worldview of Star Wars and a genuinely Christian worldview.

George Lucas

The *Star Wars* series has come to a climatic finale. Many of us can still remember the year 1977 when people stood in long lines at theaters several blocks long. It was not uncommon to hear of individuals who returned to see the movie, some over a dozen times. Few movies have generated the same excitement and following as this series. Through its production, special effects, and cinematography, *Star Wars* had a tremendous impact on the arts, setting a new standard for the movie industry.

Not only did *Star Wars* have an impact on the entertainment industry, it also opened our eyes to the worldview of pantheism. Pantheism comes from the Greek word "pan" meaning all and "theism" meaning God. It is the belief that the impersonal God is one essence with the universe. God inhabits all things. The universe is God and God is the universe. In other words, God is not separate from the universe but is contained within it. This worldview lies at the foundation of most Hindu, Buddhist, and New Age religions. This worldview gained popularity in the sixties, at a time when Eastern ideas began to enter the West. It drew public attention through celebrities such as The Beatles and Shirley McClain who embraced the teachings of the Eastern religions. *Star Wars*, with its success, continues to stir interest in the ideas of pantheism.

George Lucas borrowed themes from several religions and ancient myths in creating the story line for *Star Wars*. Lucas was not intending to introduce or promote a particular religion in his movie. However, he wanted young people to think about spiritual issues and the big questions about life. He created his movies to ". . . make young people think about

the mystery. Not to say, 'Here's the answer.' It's to say, 'Think about this for a second. Is there a God? What does God look like? What does God sound like? What does God feel like? How do we relate to God?' Just getting young people to think at that level is what I've been trying to do in the films. What eventual manifestation that takes place in terms of how they describe their God, what form their faith takes, is not the point of the movie."{1}

George Lucas should be commended in his desire to inspire people to wrestle with such issues. This is a movie rich in theology and deep in philosophical ideas that are sure to generate some profitable discussions. C.S. Lewis, J.R. Tolkien, and Fydor Dostoevsky, in their classical fiction writings, presented answers to life's questions from a theistic worldview. In *Star Wars*, Lucas has accomplished a similar classic work presenting answers to life's questions from a pantheistic worldview. For this reason *Star Wars* is a fun movie that is full of theological ideas.

In the following sections, we will examine how Lucas' pantheistic worldview is illustrated in *Star Wars,* and present a biblical critique of this fine movie series.

The Worldview of Pantheism

What are some of the major tenets of pantheism?

First, there is the concept of monism, the notion that all things are essentially of the same nature or essence. In other words, God is the universe; he is not separate from the universe but is contained within it. The universe is eternal and flows out of the divine. Therefore, creation is *ex deo* (out of God), meaning out of the hands of God. The Greek philosopher Plotinus stated that everything flows from God, be it life or flower from a seed. Good and evil, light and darkness all flow out of God.

Pantheists also believe in the absence of a divine personal being who created the universe. Instead, they attest to a divine essence, an impersonal force, a cosmic energy that flows throughout all things in the universe. This energy is called "the One," "the divine," "Chi," or "Brahma." In *Star Wars*, it is called the Force.

Following their logic, if all is one in essence, all is divine. Hence, God and man are of the same essence, so man is essentially divine. Here is an illustration. God is the large ocean and we are all drops in that ocean. As a drop of water from a rain cloud must make its journey to unite with the ocean, so every individual must make their journey to become one with the divine. Spiritual guru Deepak Chopra writes, "Your body is not separate from the universe, because at quantum mechanical levels there are no well-defined edges. You are like a wiggle, a wave, a fluctuation, a convolution, a whirlpool, a localized disturbance in the larger quantum field. The larger quantum field – the universe – is your extended body."{2} He also states, "In reality we are divinity in disguise, and gods and goddesses in embryo that are contained within us seek to be fully materialized. True success therefore is the experience of the miraculous. It is the unfolding of the divinity within us."{3}

Since we are divine, true knowledge is attained by awakening the god within through an experience known as enlightenment. The One or the divine is not understood through the senses or rational thinking but by mystical union which is beyond the conscious self. This union comes through various means such as meditation, yoga, and channeling, among others. The process includes letting go of our conscious self and reaching out with our emotions.

The ultimate destiny of man is to become absorbed into the divine. All individuals are involved in an endless cycle of reincarnation until they attain enlightenment and eventually break the cycle of reincarnation to be absorbed into the

divine. These are some of the basic teachings of pantheism that are depicted in *Star Wars*.

God and The Force

George Lucas stated that he wanted *Star Wars* to inspire young people to ask spiritual questions about God. In *Star Wars*, the idea of God is found in the Force. Lucas states, "I put the Force into the movie in order to try to awaken a certain kind of spirituality in young people – more a belief in God than a belief in any particular religious system."{4} Master Jedi Obi Won Kenobi first introduces us to the Force in 1977. Sitting in his desert hut, Obi Won explains to Luke Skywalker the nature of the Force. He states, "The Force is what gives the Jedi his power. It is an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us, penetrates us, it binds the galaxy together." The Jedi Knights and their adversaries the Siths use this cosmic energy to perform supernatural feats.

The Force reflects one of the main tenets of the pantheistic worldview, the concept of monism, that all is in essence one. The Force is not a personal being. It is an impersonal energy that is made up of and resides in all living things. Therefore, all of life has the spark of divinity because all is essentially one unified entity.

George Lucas borrows a lot of his ideas from Eastern pantheistic religions. Chinese religions such as Taoism teach that this cosmic energy is called the Chi Force. Chi flows through all living things, and therefore the powers of the universe reside in each individual. Through meditation, yoga, and other techniques of altering one's consciousness, one can master this energy within and perform supernatural feats.

Some Christians have mistakenly equated the Force with the Holy Spirit; however, there are several major differences. First, the Force is an impersonal energy field while the Holy

Spirit is a personal being, the third member of the Trinity. He has a personality, intelligence, and will. Second, the Force is made up of all living things in the universe while the Holy Spirit is not contained in the universe. The Holy Spirit is an eternal being who was involved in creating the universe out of nothing (Genesis 1). Being God, the Holy Spirit is involved in the universe but He is not contained in the universe and exists independent of living things. Third, the Force can be manipulated by the Jedi who use it to accomplish their will, but the Holy Spirit cannot be manipulated by those He indwells. Instead He guides, teaches, and empowers them to do the will of God the Father. Christians do not master the Holy Spirit to accomplish their will, but rather the Holy Spirit guides them to do His will. Finally, the Force has a good side and a dark side which exist in a state of balance while the Holy Spirit has no dark or evil side but only the attributes consistent with a holy and good God.

Salvation

The story of *Star Wars* centers on one figure, Anakin Skywalker, who is identified by the master Jedi Qui Gon Gin as the "chosen one." Anakin's birth was miraculous in that he was born of a virgin and his body has a high level of metachlorines. Qui Gon states that as the chosen one, Anakin will restore the "balance of the Force," a hope anticipated throughout the entire series. What does Lucas mean by this statement?

As stated previously, Lucas illustrates the teachings of the pantheistic worldview throughout the movie series. He borrows several concepts from Taoism, one of them being the idea of restoring the balance of the force.

Taoism teaches that there are equal and opposing forces throughout the universe that balance one another. This is

known as the yin/yang duality. Opposing forces such as positive and negative energy, light and darkness, life and death, have always been in a state of opposition. Neither side has dominance over the other, but there is a balance of these opposing forces. These forces are mutually dependent, and one cannot be known apart from the other. When these forces are not in balance, there is disharmony. When they exist in a balance, there is harmony.

Every individual must accept and live in harmony with this balance of opposing forces. When there is an imbalance of one over the other in a person, there is disharmony in one's life. When disturbed, this balance must be restored in the individual and in the world. Once balance is restored, harmony and peace returns. Darkness, death, and evil, are never defeated; they are only to be brought into balance with the opposing forces of light, life, and goodness. In *Star Wars*, the Force has two sides, a good side and a dark side. Imbalance has occurred because one side, the dark side, has become too pervasive and must be brought into balance by the opposing force of good. The dark side is not to be defeated permanently by the good but balance is to be restored to the Force. This is the concept George Lucas presents throughout the series.

In the Bible, the universe is not eternal but was created by God from nothing. The original creation was good. Evil, death, and suffering came as the result of the fall, which marred creation. The conflict between light and darkness, life and death, good and evil has not been an eternal struggle. The two forces are also not equal and in a balance. The Bible teaches that God is light, holy, good, and the life. He is not locked in an eternal struggle with opposing forces. One day at His appointed time, He will not bring balance but restoration to the universe. This will occur when God judges the world, defeats evil permanently, and establishes a new heaven and earth where sin and its effects are no longer present.

The Jedi Masters

The heroes in the *Star Wars* are the Jedi Knights. These select few individuals have mastered the Force and are powerful warriors. They function as the guardians of peace in the galactic empire and use their powers only in times of danger. Where did Lucas get his idea for the Jedi?

In a Discovery Channel documentary entitled "The Science of *Star Wars*," Lucas reveals the source of his idea. Once again, he borrows concepts from the pantheistic religions. Lucas reveals that his idea came from studying the Shao-Lin monks of China. The Shao-Lin monks are priests known for originating and becoming the masters of the martial arts. Their fighting skills were legendary throughout the land of China.

Not only are the Shao-Lin monks skillful fighters, they were also men who mastered the use of the Chi force. As previously mentioned, Chi is believed to be the cosmic energy that flows through all things including individuals. The Shao-Lin monks teach that through altering one's consciousness in meditation and other exercises, one can tap into the power of the Chi resident in each individual and use it to perform superhuman feats.

Using the Chi force, Shao-Lin monks believe they can deliver punches and kicks with devastating force. They are also able to withstand punishing blows from opponents and objects. Some even believe a master can strike down an opponent without physical contact by simply utilizing Chi energy.

In Star Wars, we see this parallel. The Jedi are dressed in garments similar to the Shao-Lin monks, are headquartered at the Temple, and are masters of the Force. Using the Force, they are able to move objects, foresee future events, manipulate people's thoughts, and strike down opponents without any physical contact. For the Jedi, truth is ultimately found in their feelings. When questions arise, the

phrase among the Jedi is, “Search your feelings. What do they tell you?” True knowledge for the Jedi is beyond the rational and instead found in feelings and intuitions beyond the rational mind. The Jedi are another example of Lucas’ pantheistic worldview.

There is much to like regarding the Jedi. They are noble heroes who are self-sacrificing, disciplined, and courageous. However, Christians should reject the idea of the Force that is the power behind the Jedi. The Bible does not teach that there is a cosmic energy or Chi that flows through objects and individuals. Throughout their training, Jedi are taught to let go of the conscious mind and reach out with their feelings. Christians are taught to love God “with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). Christians do not abandon their mind but develop it to understand truth and God’s will (Romans 12:1-2). The mind and heart work together through prayer, study of the Word, and guidance of the Holy Spirit to discern truth and God’s will in situations.

What Happens After Death?

What happens after death? This is another question George Lucas hoped young people would ask as they viewed this series. *Star Wars* presents an answer that once again reflects the teaching of pantheism. Pantheism teaches that we are all in an endless cycle of reincarnation until we attain enlightenment. It is then that we escape this cycle and become one with the divine meaning and become absorbed into the cosmic energy of the universe.

In *The Revenge of the Sith*, Anakin Skywalker is haunted with nightmares of his wife Padme dying at the birth of their child. Tormented by this dream he seeks the counsel of Yoda, the master of the Jedi. Yoda imparts to Anakin that death is a natural part of the universe. In other words, we should accept

it without emotion. He adds that one should not grieve for those who have died and become part of the Force. Anakin must not become attached to things, including people, for attachment to objects leads to jealousy and the dark side of the Force. One must release all feelings from things, for it is only then that one's thinking will be clear.

Thus, in *Star Wars* those who die become absorbed into the Force. We also learn that the Jedi are able to delay this absorption and appear as spirit guides to aid those in the physical world. Those with special insight may learn how to communicate with these ascended masters.

This teaching is another fundamental tenet of pantheistic religions. Pantheism teaches that the material world is an illusion. Therefore, one should not grow attached to earthly things for they are merely an illusion and are not permanent. Several schools of Hinduism and Buddhism teach that this world is an illusion and, as such, we must rid ourselves of all desires. The most holy of followers will therefore live lives of celibacy and poverty, releasing themselves from any desire and spending their days in meditation and study. At death, some holy men will delay their union with the divine and remain as spirit guides to aid those on the journey to enlightenment.

The Bible teaches that at death, we will not be absorbed into an impersonal energy field but we will retain our personhood and stand before God in judgment. There is no reincarnation or second chance. Hebrews 9:7 states that "It is appointed for each person to die once and then comes the judgment." Those who know Jesus will spend eternity with the Lord and fellow believers for all eternity. Those who have rejected Christ will spend eternity separated from God in Hell. The Bible presents a destiny that is just, but also filled with hope for those who know Jesus.

The answer presented in *Star Wars*, the annihilation of one's

consciousness and absorption into a cosmic energy field, is a false one that even if true, would provide insufficient hope.

How to Watch *Star Wars*

When it comes to movies, there are three basic responses among Christians. Some choose to avoid any movie that may teach contrary beliefs for fear that they or their children may be negatively influenced. Others are consumers and watch any movie believing it is harmless fun and entertainment. A third option is to select appropriate movies and then view them with discernment. I take the third position. The arts are meant to be enjoyed and to glorify God. Creation itself reflects the creative mind of God who designed man with the capacity to produce art. Man, however, many times uses the arts for less than noble reasons. However, Christians can learn valuable lessons about other belief systems and use movies as great teaching tools to help younger believers become more discerning and understand other worldviews.

In *Star Wars* we have a great teaching and discussion topic. There is much we should commend George Lucas for in this series. *Star Wars* is creative, entertaining, and family-friendly. It also promotes several good themes such as friendship, courage, and the dangerous corrupting power of selfish ambition. We should furthermore commend Lucas on his desire to make a movie that would inspire young people to think about deeper issues in life.

In the *Time Magazine* interview, Lucas states that he wanted young people to think about spiritual issues and the big questions about life. I certainly agree with Lucas, and wish more movies were designed for such purposes.

Star Wars is a great discussion piece because it creatively reflects the tenets of pantheism. Christians can use this film to discuss spiritual lessons revealed in the series. I have had profitable discussions with teens and adults on the

spiritual principles illustrated in *Star Wars*. Questions such as “What do you think about the whole idea of the Force?”, “Is there such a thing as a cosmic energy field?”, “Can we master the power of this energy?”, “What did *Star Wars* teach regarding what happens after death?”, or “What do you think really happens after death?” have arisen in conversations.

Answers to these questions often lead to great discussions regarding worldviews, the nature of truth, and eternal life. *Star Wars* offers answers from a pantheistic worldview, which Christians can point out and explain why these answers are false. Movies like *Star Wars* can be a great teaching tool when Christians are equipped and informed to discern truth from error.

Notes

1. Bill Moyer, “Of Myth and Men,” *Time* Magazine, (26 April, 1999), 93.
2. Deepak Chopra, *Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*, p.68, quoted in Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods*, (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2000), 68.
3. Ibid., 96.
4. Ibid., 92.

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